

Prolapse of the vagina, cervix, or uterus

Richard Hopper, DVM

Prolapses or eversion of the reproductive organs of cows are common occurrences and can be a potentially life threatening condition for the cow. A uterine prolapse and a vaginal [or cervico-vaginal] prolapse are very different and distinct problems, although someone who has never or seldom sees these conditions could easily confuse them. Regardless both need to be corrected as soon as possible, with the uterine prolapse being the greatest emergency.

First, I will discuss the uterine prolapse. The uterine prolapse [pictured below] is considered an accident of parturition [calving]. The cow following delivery of the calf, for a number of possible reasons and because she is still pushing, strains and pushes the everted uterus out. Before joining the faculty at Mississippi State in the early 90s I practiced for 15 years in North Alabama in a region that was hilly and where most pastures were terraced. Many of the uterine prolapses I corrected were on cows that had calved on a terrace row or hillside with their hind end pointed downhill. They would have the calf and then their continued pushing plus gravity would do the rest.

Regardless of the cause, this is what you need to do when you encounter a cow with a uterine prolapse. First, make sure she is restrained. If she is down it is best for her to stay down. After this place the uterus in a garbage bag [pictured below] to help keep it as clean as possible. What is actually best is to pour cool, not cold water that you have added some salt and sugar to over the uterus and inside the bag. This will keep the tissue soft [alive] and will aid in shrinking the swollen tissue. Also, while you are waiting for your veterinarian to arrive, you can attend to the needs of the calf.



This prolapse once replaced does not necessarily need to be “sutured in” to stay, in fact I prefer not to put a vaginal stitch for this type of prolapse. Also, this is as I stated earlier an accident of calving and thus not hereditary. You can retain both her and any of her female offspring. Most will however experience a delayed or longer open period before becoming pregnant again.

Vaginal or vaginal/cervical prolapses almost always occur in late pregnancy. These are hereditary and so you should cull them and also any heifer offspring. There are some breeds [Hereford, Shorthorn, and Brahman] and their crosses that appear to be more prone to this. The cow in the next picture has a vaginal prolapse.



This type of prolapse is relatively easy to replace [unless the urinary bladder is also involved] but a retention method must be used. The most popular method among veterinarians is a “purse-string” suture that is placed in & around the vulva with the use of a specialized needle and a surgical gauze strip. This will usually hold the vagina in very well, but must be removed prior to the calf’s delivery. At the college of veterinary medicine we are evaluating another method that is a variation of a retention method developed over 60 years ago, that holds the vagina in but allows delivery of the calf. A lot of veterinarians can perform this procedure or a similar technique that uses a rigid plastic pin with “buttons” that are both inside the vagina and outside on the hip [as shown in the next picture]. These hold the vagina in place and also allow delivery of the calf. They are both more technically difficult and more time consuming.



Although I hope that the information on this subject is useful, I especially hope that you have the good fortune of not needing to utilize any of this. But as you know “bad things happen to good people” and since cattlemen are the best people in the world – be prepared.