**Sometime We Are Mean to Our Cows**
 **Well this is awkward. I have spent the last two years talking about our farm and how much I love my cows. If you have read more than a few posts here I hope that you understand my deep love for the cows in my care, “my girls“.

 That being said sometimes I am mean to my cows. If you were to ask me if I have ever hit one of my cows I couldn’t tell you no without lying.

 I am going to let you in on a secret, PETA and Mercy For Animals have shown you some truth in their undercover videos on dairy farms. The truth is sometimes as a dairy farmer I am mean to my cows.

 I think it’s time we talk about “down" cows.

*What's a down cow?* A down cow is a cow that is sick or injured and is laying down and can’t or won’t get up. A down cow is the kind of thing that will make your day go from great to very bad in short order. A down cow isn’t just something that happens on a dairy farm, beef cows can go down out on pasture, organic cows go down if it's a cow, it can go down.

*Why does a cow go down?***
**A down cow can be down for about a million reasons. It can be something like she hurt her leg and doesn’t want to
put weight on it to get up. It can be because she just had a calf and during delivery she pinched a nerve. A cow can be down because after calving she has a calcium imbalance that needs to be corrected. There are lots of reasons for a cow *to go down.

 So what’s the big deal if a cow goes down?* A cow is a big animal, I think we can all agree on that right? When a cow lays down for long periods of time all of her weight rests on her legs. Her legs start to lose circulation, as they lose circulation they become weak. A cow needs strong legs to lift her hefty frame up. The longer a cow is down the lesser her chances of ever getting back up become. It doesn’t matter what caused the cow to go down in the first place, a down cow that doesn’t get up becomes a dead cow.

*How do you get a down cow up?* This is where I will admit, I have been mean to my cows. But before you think I am a horrible person, let’s look at the facts. What do you do when a cow is really in trouble? You get serious. Undercover animal rights videos like to show cows being yelled at and hit,** **having cattle prods used on them, being drug along the ground or being**
**lifted with skid loaders or other heavy equipment. I will fully admit that I have done every one of those things.

Lifting a down cow takes patience and knowledge to keep her safe from hurting herself or us. A down cow is a dead cow. You have to get a cow on her feet if she is going to live. Time is of the essence. She absolutely has to get up.

 When we have a down cow the first thing we do is ask her to get up. If she doesn’t try to get up with that we know we have to try harder. As evident by their lack of talons, fangs and upper teeth, a cow is a prey animal. Prey animals operate on the fight or flight mentality, preferring flight whenever possible. A cow doesn’t want to fight with the scary thing, a cow wants to get away from the scary thing. In order to get away from the scary thing a cow has to get up!

 When asking and gentle encouragement doesn’t work, I make myself scary to a cow. I yell and holler. I act aggressive. I smack harder. When that doesn’t work I know that things are going really bad and I have to try harder to get her up. The next step is for me to use the cattle prod.

 A cattle prod delivers a painful electric shock. It hurts. It’s not a shock that will incapacitate you like a taser, but it’s not a gentle nuzzle from a puppy nose. I have never been hit by one and I really don’t want to feel what it feels like but if it was a choice between dying and getting hit by a cattle prod charge? I hope the batteries are fresh!

 When the cattle prod doesn’t work we get the skid loader. We will use a hip lift to lift the cow and allow her legs to regain circulation. When a cow weighs from 1,000-2,000lbs it takes heavy equipment to lift her.

Speaking of skid loaders, when a cow goes down in a place where she is blocking other cows or is at risk of being stepped on by other cows you have to move her. In a perfect world we roll her onto a sled and drag the sled with the cow on it to a better place, but life isn’t perfect. We have had cows that I have been nursing through an illness walk into the milking parlor, lay down and refuse to get up. Obviously you can’t just let them lay there. There is no way to get a sled or equipment to lift the cow into the parlor. That’s when we have to drag the cow to the sled. It sucks. I hate it. I also know that there isn’t another choice if I want the cow to live.

 I know that on any day that includes a down cow, if Mercy for Animals was undercover on our dairy farm, they could make a video and post it on YouTube and it would convince millions of people that I am an animal abuser in just a few short moments. On a good day, after giving it our all the cow gets up. She is sullen, scared and probably hates us but she is alive. The video's would never show that. That part doesn’t fit what they want to tell you.

 Mercy for Animals, PETA, Compassion Over Killing and other animal rights groups like to include video footage of these kinds of situations to try and turn people against me and my industry. Yes, some videos also show true abuse and I absolutely do not condone animal abuse. I am NOT making excuses for abusers. They deserve to rot. But I hope the next time another one of these abuse videos comes out that shows a down cow situation people take a little longer to think about what they saw and how they would handle that kind of situation

I love my cows and that means sometimes I have to be mean to
them.** Treatment of Wisconsin Dairy Cows on Farm