Prolapses are something to be expected eventually in livestock production. Whether or not a producer should cull a cow after she prolapses depends on a few factors. To begin, there are two types of prolapses, vaginal and uterine that can affect cows or heifers that have calved or are about to. While both likely need attention, the culling outcome is dependent on both type of prolapse as well as the ability of the female to repair and re-breed.

Vaginal prolapses most commonly occur when a cow or heifer is in late gestation. It is usually observed when there is a significant amount of pressure in the abdominal cavity causing the organ to bulge when the female lays down. This type of prolapse is more common than uterine prolapses and is viewed as less severe in terms of treatment. However, this condition still exposes the organ to wind, sun, and pathogens making her susceptible to injury or disease. Furthermore, once a female has had this type of prolapse it is more likely to occur during subsequent pregnancies. Beyond a risk for reoccurring, the female may also pass the condition on to her offspring. Researchers have found that vaginal prolapses have a genetic component, increasing the likelihood of daughters of cows who experience this more likely to prolapse themselves. Additionally, bull calves should not be retained out of females which suffer from vaginal prolapses as they may pass on genetics to their daughters making them more likely to experience the problem as well. While the condition does not always require much in terms of treatment, it is the long lasting effects that may be detrimental to a cow-calf operation.

On the other hand, uterine prolapses most commonly occur during or shortly after calving and require immediate attention. Unlike vaginal prolapses, no genetic component has been detected through research of uterine prolapses. Therefore when treated correctly, cows that suffer a uterine prolapse are no more likely to experience another compared to others. However, the trauma that occurs to the uterus after prolapse could make it more difficult for the female to conceive the next breeding season. If the cow is open or late-bred at the time of pregnancy detection, she probably decided her own fate. However, it is possible that a cow can repair any damage experienced during a uterine prolapse and rebreed during the breeding season. If this is the case, if there are not any other justifications for culling it is not vital that she leave the cowherd.

A study by Patterson and colleagues (1981) recorded 13,296 calvings over 14 years. Of those calvings, 153 were associated with either a vaginal or uterine prolapse. Vaginal prolapses made up 81%, while uterine prolapses made up 19% of the events recorded. The study also investigated the pregnancy rate after a prolapse. Results revealed that the pregnancy rate of first calf heifers was 28% and the rate of mature cows was 57.9% (Patterson et al., 1981). This suggests that first calf heifers which suffer a prolapse have more difficulty repairing and conceiving following the event. In a more recent study Carluccio and colleagues (2019) recorded 33,450 calvings in dairy and beef cattle for uterine prolapses. They found that 1% of beef cows experienced uterine prolapses, compared to 0.6% of dairy cows. For all cows in the study 81.9% recovered, 8.3% died before or immediately after treatment, and 9.7% were culled for economic reasons such as poor fertility, poor weight gain, and low milk yield (Carluccio et al., 2019). Conception rate for beef cows in the study was 87.5% when naturally mated. Results of the study suggest that cows that suffer a uterine prolapse and then are treated typically have high chance of survival and conception, and a low risk of experiencing another prolapse. The study by Patterson and colleagues (1981) however suggests that first calf heifers are less likely to rebreed compared to mature cows.

As mentioned any culling decisions that follow a prolapse are typically dependent on the prolapse type. Due to the genetic component of vaginal prolapses, all offspring of a female which has had a vaginal prolapse would be prone to experiencing the condition and bulls could pass it on to their daughters. Therefore, its considered good practice to cull any females that suffer vaginal prolapses from the herd. In the case of uterine prolapse, since a genetic component has not been identified for this condition if treated correctly the female is no more likely to experience another prolapse of the same type or pass it to her offspring. However, a uterine prolapse can be very traumatic to the organ exposing it to the elements, pathogens, and sometimes harsh handling during treatment. It is these conditions that may affect the ability of the female to rebreed the following season. In this case, an open female left unproductive for an entire year should be culled as soon as possible.

Prolapses are one of the conditions that many producers dread, but must handle when they arise. In summary, a producer should let the type of prolapse and the ability of a female to rebreed decide her fate. They should be more forgiving to females who experience uterine prolapses and then rebreed on time. Those who experience vaginal prolapses should be given less credit when culling if possible.