

MAFES Dawg Tracks

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Handling Cattle Safely



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY

Agriculture operations continue to be one of the most dangerous occupations in all industries. If you talk to farmers and ranchers, they will let you know that the risks or dangers involved in their occupations are just part of the job. According to Oklahoma State University Department of Biosystems and Agr. Engineering, beef handling is one of the least investigated areas in agriculture safety. Their study showed conditions associated with 150 cattle handling injury cases on 10 cow-calf operations.

This study revealed that more than 50 percent of these injuries were caused through human error and equipment and facilities accounted for about 25 percent of the injuries. In most cases, a better understanding of how an animal may respond to human interaction and to its immediate surroundings will help keep the worker from becoming an injury victim.

HUMAN ELEMENT-

- Human error is the cause of most accidents.
- Errors in judgment are usually caused by fatigue, hurrying, preoccupation or carelessness.
- Human physical, psychological, and physiological factors greatly affect the occurrence of life threatening accidents.

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR-

- Understanding cattle behavior can help farm and ranch workers avoid dangerous situations. Dr. Tempe Grandin, Colorado State University animal behavior specialist, states that handling practices can be less stressful to the animals and safer for the handler if one understands the behavior characteristics of livestock.
- An animal's physical structure, psychological makeup, environment, and individual personality can influence behavior.
- An animal's senses function like those of a human, but they detect and perceive their surroundings differently than a human in the same environment.
- Cattle inherently have poor color recognition and poor depth perception, but their hearing is extremely sensitive compared to humans. These factors help to explain why cattle can be skittish and balky in unfamiliar surroundings.

ANIMAL VISION-

- ✓ Cattle have panoramic vision, meaning they can see in all directions except behind them without moving their heads.
- ✓ Facilities should be constructed to eliminate shadows as much as possible. Cattle have poor depth perception. This is especially true when they are walking with their heads up. For them to see depth, they have to put their heads down. When they see unfamiliar objects on the ground or shadows, they usually will stop, and this is why the cattle behind them get piled up.
- ✓ If you do much cattle working at night, frosted lights should be installed to reduce the glare into their faces.

OTHER BEHAVIOR TIPS-

- ❖ Most animals, like humans respond to calm, gentle, and consistent handling.
- ❖ Livestock become skittish when their ordinary routines or familiar surroundings change.
- ❖ Animals have a definite social order.
- ❖ Domestic livestock, especially cattle and sheep, are herd animals. They may become agitated when they are isolated and will try to return to the group.
- ❖ Livestock detect people by their movement, which is more important to animals than what is moving.

BASIC POINTS TO REMEMBER-

- *Beef, swine, sheep and dairy animals are all colorblind.*
- *Cattle, horses, and mules all have a panoramic field of vision.*
- *Livestock have strong maternal instincts.*
- *Animals respond to the way they are treated by humans based on past experience.*
- *Livestock are sensitive to noise and are frightened easily.*
- *Always have an escape route when working with livestock in close quarters.*
- *Move quickly, deliberately and patiently. Avoid quick movements or loud noises that may startle the animals.*

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