

MAFES Dawg Tracks

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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
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Safety Tips: Handling
Cattle Easily and Safely

Livestock handling related injuries are among the most severe of all agricultural related injuries.

The Colorado Workers' Compensation Authority made a 10-year study from 1997-2006. They found that there was 1,114 livestock handling claims, 50% of these were related to the dairy industry for milk parlor related claims. Horseback riding, sorting/penning, and livestock handling equipment accounted for a high percentage of claims by cattle raisers and cattle dealers. Their summary concluded that improved handling methods would greatly improve their profitability and would decrease injury losses through the workers' compensation claims. Following are some tips, developed by Ron Lemenger of Purdue University, also a rancher that will be beneficial to you, if you put them into practice:

- ✓ **Reduce shadows, color contrasts and noise** – Cattle want to take flight if they can't see what is ahead. Shadows and color patterns may confuse and disturb them. When setting up a working chute, consider the sun angles and light sources. Reduce the shadows by putting solid sides on the chutes and crows pens. Artificial light overhead reduces shadows and dangling chains and ratting gates will cause cattle to balk sometimes.
- ✓ **Remember when you are working cattle in an open pen or pasture their blind spot is directly behind them.** Cattle won't respond to commands or signals from there. Work to the side or 30° to 35° off of straight behind. Cattle are likely to respond better from this position.
- ✓ **Have at least two holding pens with a gate between them that lets you easily sort cows from calves.**
- ✓ **Study up on locking head gate designs, straight neck bars, curved bars, scissors and full opening.** There is a swinging salon-door design. All of these work and all have disadvantages, says Dr. Lemenger. What he feels stronger about is having one that securely locks the bars on the animal's neck. It should be a positive engagement latch with notch locks that can't slip.
- ✓ **Add a brisket bar, cow palpation gate and palpation cage for preg checks.** The brisket bar keeps her from going down on her front knees. A side door is a must to get in the chute behind her. You have to be protected from getting run over by the next cow behind her.

- ✓ **Prevent turning by making sure working alleys and chutes are ideally 18 inches wide for calves and 30 inches for cows.** Walls should be 5 feet tall and sturdy enough to contain your biggest cows.
- ✓ **Consider a bud box to keep cattle from coming back in the direction from which they came.** To take advantage of this, some producers have built a holding pen, sometimes called a bud box, leading into a working chute. The box is 12x20 feet. The entry gate is next to the chute entrance. You put cattle in the box, and as they try to go back through the same gate they entered, they funnel into the chute. It takes advantage of their natural instincts.
- ✓ **Make sure calving pens have enough to maneuver a calf jack.** Jacks are long (for leverage) and cumbersome. Create some wide spaces or side panels that easily move to allow for the jack.
- ✓ **Give some traction to concrete floors of chutes and working pens.** Dr. Lemenger suggests that a severe broom swept finish is sufficient for traction. If you're stuck with a small floor, try bolting wood strips or rebar to the floor, with openings wide enough for their feet.
- ✓ **Put gates in the direction you want cattle to move through the paddock.** Dr. Lemenger likes to connect pastures and paddocks. If you're usually moving cattle in a northerly direction through alleyways, put the gates in the north corners of paddocks. Moving will become routine to them.
- ✓ **Make gates into paddocks 16 feet wide, not 12.** Make alleyways 20 to 30 feet wide.
- ✓ **Make it easy to get a drink.** On his own farm, Dr. Lemenger had 25 cow-calf pairs drinking from a two-bowl automatic drinker. Cows would take turns and then head back to graze before the cows could drink.

Actually, this is a different wrinkle on handling cattle, describing the working areas. I felt that this could be of some benefit to see how ideal working pen conditions are as it gives you a perspective, of which it might offer an opportunity to improve your own conditions.

Dr. Ron Lemenger is a professor at Purdue University and has his own cattle ranch, so the tips above are from an experienced rancher with "tried and true" methods.

**GOOD WORK HABITS WILL
KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE!**

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**<>BE SMART <><><> PRACTICE
SAFETY FROM THE START <>**

Ted Gordon-Risk Mgmt. / Loss Control Mgr.
MAFES / MSU-EXTENSION (662) 566-2201
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www.agriculture.com/livestock/cattle/beef/12-tips-f-hling-cattle-easily-safely_277-ar