

MAFES Dawg Tracks



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Safety Tips: Livestock Handling



Production agriculture consistently ranks as one of the most dangerous of all American industries. A recent survey by the National Safety Council (NSC) ranks beef cattle farms and dairy operations as the #2 and #3 respectively of all agriculture related businesses in the rate of injuries per hours of work. Also, animals are involved in 17% of all farm injuries and are equal to the number of accidents involving farm machinery.

Experienced animal handlers will tell you that animals perform and produce the best when they are relaxed, and tranquil; and their environment is as comfortable as can reasonably be.

Animals in traumatic exposures or environments are more likely to over-react when there are sudden changes in their surroundings or unfamiliar happenings occur. Take extra caution when animals are being medically treated, examined, loaded, and moved or any other handling operations.

Experienced cattlemen tell you that animals have the ability to communicate, even though they can't actually speak. Most animals have and will display the characteristics of fear, aggression, and contentment. Experienced handlers will be conscience of these warnings, which are identified with:

- Raised or pinned ears
- Raised tail
- Raised back hair
- Barred teeth
- Pawing the ground and/or snorting

Most of your experienced cattlemen are very familiar with good handling methods. But for the benefit of newer employees who are involved with animals, the following tips may prove to be helpful; and for our experienced cattlemen, a review never hurts to help keep you focused:

- Most animals respond positively to routines involving calm, deliberate responses.
- Avoid loud noises and quick movements.
- Move slowly and deliberate around livestock.
- Touching animals gently can be more effective than bumping or shoving them.
- Respect rather than fear livestock. Breeding stock can be highly protective and sometimes irritable. Their disposition deteriorates with age. Old breeding stock can be cantankerous, deceptive and unpredictable; also large enough to hurt you. Male animals should be considered to be dangerous at all times.
- If you are working in close quarters with livestock, always have you an escape route.
- Be extra careful around strange or new animals and enforce strict security when visitors or strangers are in the close proximity of the area.

I've been told that animals will even respond favorably to relaxing talk, soft music, singing, and hand signals. My friends in another state have music in their milking parlors for their livestock.

WORKING FACILITIES:

Many injuries can be traced back to inadequate facilities, equipment failures, poor buildings, and loading structures. The above conditions can negatively affect everyday operations in production efficiencies, and the risk of accidents to the livestock and humans.

- Trip hazards like high doorsills, narrow alleys, uneven alleys, and walking surfaces should be avoided. A current study showed that 18% of all animal-related accidents result from falls.
- Concrete floors with rough floor surfaces, grooved walkways, and alleyways are best for livestock.
- Good strong fencing and gates are critical for security. The chute walls should be solid where possible instead of fencing and wide enough for the animals to pass, but not wide enough for them to turn around. The solid walls are for obvious reasons; the cattle will respond better and want be able to balk from outside interferences.
- There should not be any protruding objects for livestock or humans to fall or brush against or run into and cause an injury.
- The area should have good lighting and diffused to prevent glare and shadows. These things tend to "spook" livestock.

Presently, all of our cattle working facilities have been updated to have all or most all of the items that we discussed above.

GENERAL SAFETY REMINDERS FOR LIVESTOCK HANDLING:

- Good housekeeping is essential for our personal safety, but it is just as important to protect our animals.
- Respect all animals. They may not hurt you on purpose, but their size and bulk can be dangerous.
- Keep children away from animals, particularly in livestock working areas.
- Limited security should be practiced where possible to prevent outside diseases from being brought in.
- Take extra care around male animals, and "mommas" with newborn babies. They tend to be very protective of their young. Stay clear of "spooked" animals.
- Keep facilities in good condition. Lagoons and ponds should be fenced in for added security.

The above text offers ideas on handling, maintaining facilities, etc. But the best methods, like most other working environments, are good old "common sense."

SAFETY SHOULDN'T ONLY BE A SLOGAN

BUT A WAY OF LIFE!