

LIVESTOCK HANDLING

Anyone who has worked with livestock realizes that each animal has its own personality. Few farm people look upon their livestock as a source of danger, however, farm incidents involving livestock are a major cause of injuries and deaths each year. Livestock is second only to machinery as a cause of farm incidents.

To deal effectively with any animal, the handler must have some knowledge of the animal's general characteristics such as mentality, instincts and physical attributes. The animal's individuality and possible unique behaviour must be considered. Farm animal senses differ a great deal from those of humans.

- cattle have close to 360 degree panoramic vision.
- farm animals see things in "black and white", not in colour.
- they have difficulty judging distance.
- animals can detect sound that our ears cannot hear.
- high frequency sound actually hurt their ears.

Animals can never be taken for granted; you can never be absolutely sure of how they will react.

An appreciation of animals' characteristics is crucial to working safely with livestock. These should be considered when designing livestock facilities.

LIVESTOCK FACILITIES

Poor facilities and equipment can cause injuries to animals and man. Prior to construction or renovation of livestock facility, considerable planning should be done. Animal characteristics should be considered along with possible expansion in the design of a facility.

1. Alley and Loading Chutes

- wide enough for free passage of the animal but not wide enough for the animal to turn around in.
- catwalks on the outside of the alley or chute so you do not have to enter the alleyway or hang over the edge.
- Solid walls on chutes and turns in the alley to reduce chances of the animal being frightened from the outside.
- Floors should be designed to guard against slipping yet easily kept clean.

2. Fences and Gates

- strong enough to withstand animal crowding.
- free of any sharp projections such as nails or wire.

3. Floors

- concrete or other impervious materials.
- slip proof (grooved in passageways).

4. Lighting

- even diffused lighting.
- avoid having animals look directly into the sun.
- animals move easier from dark to light areas.
- Lighting may affect productivity of some animals.

5. Restraining

- restraining chutes should be free of any obstructions that could hurt the animal.
- The handler should have free access to any part of the animal without having to reach over or through the chute.
- All restraining equipment should be checked regularly for wear or damage.
- Portable handling equipment should be securely anchored before use.

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CONSIDER THE ANIMAL

Some procedures in the handling of animals are the same regardless of animal:

- avoid rough handling.
- do not tease or provoke.
- avoid loud shouts or noises that could startle an animal.
- don't enter a pen where you don't have a quick exit.
- mothers are protective; don't come between them and their offspring.
- match your handling skill to the temperament and size of the animal.

THE HANDLER

Handling methods vary greatly for types of livestock, however there are some generally accepted rules for all animals:

- respect livestock - don't fear it,
- be calm and deliberate; most animals respond to routine,
- avoid quick movements or loud noises, announce your presence well in advance of getting close to an animal to avoid startling it,
- be patient, never prod an animal when it has nowhere to go,
- always provide yourself with an escape route when working with an animal in close quarters.

PHYSICAL HAZARDS

The most common physical hazards livestock handlers are exposed to include; kicks, crushes, slips / falls and abrasions / punctures. These hazards can be controlled by good facility maintenance, training and use of personal protective equipment. Use of safety footwear with appropriate soles, leather gloves and clothing that is not overly loose which could get easily snagged is important.

HEALTH HAZARDS

The hazards presented to livestock handlers health include; zoonoses (infectious diseases transmitted from animal to humans), allergies due to complex organic dust, noise and chemical / medicinal exposures.

Common zoonotic diseases such as; rabies, tetanus, anthrax, brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis are all controllable. Proper animal handling and good personal hygiene and prompt veterinary and medical attention will minimize adverse effects.

Adequate respiratory protection is essential to reduce the potential of inhalation of organic dust particles such as animal dander, moulds, spores and plant particles. Once these types of particles enter the respiratory system there is a distinct possibility that the body may react to the particle in an allergic or irritative fashion and subsequent exposures may be more severe.

Exposure to veterinary medicines and animal blood and body fluids may have a health impact on livestock handlers. Carefully follow administration directions and take great care to avoid needle sticks or direct personal contact with the drugs or animal body fluids.