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## Increasing the Safety of Livestock Facilities

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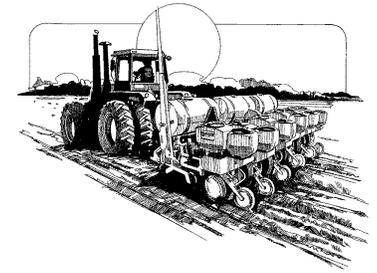




## Agricultural Health and Safety

Fact Sheet AHS-10

### Increasing the Safety of Livestock Facilities



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Working with animals in production agriculture carries with it a certain amount of inherent risk. Handling facilities are vital to the success of any cattle operation and provide for the quick, safe, and easy handling of cattle. Many injuries that are related to the care and handling of animals result from machines, tools, or structures, rather than by the animals themselves. Operating and maintaining facilities that are designed with worker safety in mind can greatly reduce the amount of risk associated with working with livestock. Well designed facilities provide both efficiency and safety.

#### Considerations When Designing and Installing New Handling Facilities

The following are items that should be considered for new or upgrading operations that will be using new facilities.

- Choose a well drained area with a slight slope away from the headgate and squeeze area. Rough concrete pads around the chute and headgate provides cattle with solid footing by preventing depressions from forming.
- Provide sufficient handling room. For mature cattle, the recommended space is 20' x 20' per head. Pens that are too large make it difficult for a single worker to sort

cattle. Sorting pens and alleys should be kept simple. Several pens are preferred over one large holding pen. This makes it easier for workers to sort cattle into smaller groups that are more manageable. Alleys should be between 12 and 14 feet. Pens should be equipped with emergency exits and allow the worker easy access to and from the animal.

- Crowding and working chutes. Chutes should be long, curved, and solid sided. This helps cattle to move freely because they are unable to view handlers until they are at the squeeze chute. This also takes advantage of the cattle's natural tendency to circle around the handler. It is also important to keep in mind the type and uniformity of animals that you are handling when designing chutes. Overhead restrainers and sloped sides prevent cattle from turning around and balking.
- Strong fences and gates are essential for safe handling of livestock. Use pressure treated posts that prevent decay. Curved fences encourage cattle to move along the fence line and don't give them the opportunity to bunch up in a corner. The strategic positioning of gates facilitates the movement of cattle from pen to pen and

into other areas. Solid gates prevent cattle from seeing lights and shadows that cause the animals to balk. Gates should be equipped with latches that are self-locking. Latches that can be operated from the catwalk provide additional convenience and safety for the operator.

- **Ensure catwalk safety.** Catwalks remove the need for workers to be in the alley or working chute and from having direct contact with the animal. They should not extend over a working chute. Catwalks that are more than 18" off the ground, it should be equipped with a guard rail to prevent falling and should not be any higher than three feet below the top of the fence.
- **Face loading chutes north or south.** This prevents cattle from looking directly into the sun and balking as a result.
- **Properly designed facilities will allow one person to work the cattle as required.** It is important to keep in mind that additional help increases the ease and safety in handling cattle. Facilities should be designed so that workers are never required to enter small or enclosed areas with animals.

### **How to Safety Proof Your Existing Handling Facilities**

Often times, injuries that occur around handling facilities are not directly related to the animals. Common causes of many injuries are: bad lighting, old or faulty equipment, a lack of experience, carelessness, improper apparel, preoccupation, and hurrying to fast. The lack of handrails, faulty steps, electrical tools, and equipment left plugged in also create hazards around livestock handling facilities.

The following checklist should be used to ensure the safety of existing handling facilities.

- Post warning signs around animal handling facilities.
- Maintain even lighting. Shadows and light

spots create fear and tension in animals.

- Keep your work area clean and free from debris. To avoid falling and tripping, ensure that floors and ramps are clean.
- Test levers and latches to verify they are functional and safe.
- Survey all facilities for sharp edges, protrusions, corners, and nails that have the potential for causing injury.
- Use and maintain all equipment according to manufacturers' instructions. Promptly repair all equipment in a proper manner. Gates and restraints that are makeshift are unsafe, and can lead to injury.
- Power tools and all electrical machinery should be properly installed, grounded, shielded, and able to be locked out.
- Properly store all sharp tools and equipment including files, cutters, and pitchforks.

### **Pertinent References**

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