



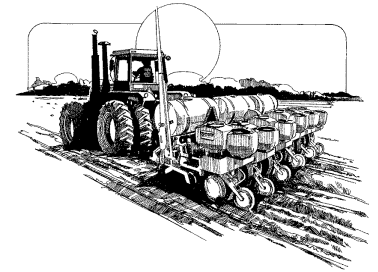
Agricultural Health and Safety

Fact Sheet AHS-11



Livestock Safety

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One of the most important issues for consideration when handling livestock is safety. Although considered domesticated animals, working with livestock carries with it an inherent risk of danger. It is important to understand that livestock have both instincts and habits, known as behavior patterns, that are based on actions that make them the most comfortable. These instincts and habits allow them to react to changes in their environment. Many instincts and habits are strong and potentially dangerous. Using common sense, practicing caution, and understanding livestock behavior can greatly reduce a handlers risk and enable him or her to work safely with livestock. This article will detail some important livestock behaviors as well as cautionary tips to practice when handling livestock.

Livestock Behaviors

- Animals who are used to being around other livestock can become frightened and agitated when separated, becoming dangerous and difficult to handle.
- The maternal instinct is also very powerful. Many times these instincts are not evident in an animal's behavior until shortly after giving birth. It is important to recognize these behavior patterns and use appropriate caution.
- Another behavior pattern that livestock

may exhibit is a territorial instinct. Feed time is when this instinct is most readily observable.

- A valuable behavior is the instinct to follow the leader. Often times, all that is required is to begin one animal moving and the rest will follow.
- Livestock exhibit the most activity at sunrise and sunset. In contrast, livestock are the most inactive during night and at midday.
- The flight zone is one of the most important principles regarding livestock behavior and safe handling. It is an animal's personal space. Livestock will react in a variety of ways according to a handlers activities relative to their flight zone. For example, livestock will face a handler and maintain a safe distance, when the handler is outside their flight zone. In contrast, livestock will turn away from a handler who enters their flight zone. Individual animals will have flight zones of varying size. Working from the edge of the flight zone will generally keep livestock calm and manageable.
- The point of balance is another important behavioral principle to understand. An animal's point of balance is located at their shoulders. An animal will move depending

on a handler's position relative to their point of balance. This principle can be used to calmly and easily encourage livestock through crowding pens, chutes, and squeezes. For example, when a handler stands behind the animal's point of balance, the animal will move forward. When the handler stands in front of an animal's point of balance, the animal will stop or back up. To encourage an animal forward, simply walk towards the animal, crossing the point of balance, and it will move forward.

Precautionary Measures

The following are precautionary measures that are recommended to anyone when working with livestock.

- Be alert. It is impossible to fully know or predict an animal's actions. Always be aware of what is happening around you. This is particularly important when handling livestock at sunrise and sunset when livestock are most active.
- Keep animals together. Livestock will be more calm and cooperative when in groups. When alone, they quickly become agitated and frightened making them dangerous and difficult to handle.
- Carefully approach animals. Because of the placement of their eyes, cattle have approximately a 270 degree range of vision. Despite their range of vision, cattle have poor depth perception, and are unable to see behind them. To reduce risk, always announce yourself when approaching an animal.
- Leave yourself an out. Never enter small enclosed areas with livestock. If unavoidable, always be sure there is always a fast and easy method of escape.
- Avoid quick movements and loud noises. Livestock can startle and frighten easily. Move slowly and deliberately around livestock. Be careful not to create excess

noise.

- Be patient. When working with livestock in a crowding pen, chute, or squeeze, prodding an animal when it has no place to go is dangerous. Animals can react quickly and violently.
- Respect livestock. Do not fear them. Underestimating an animal's size, strength, and speed can result in serious injury. Always consider mature males to be dangerous. Be aware of animals who are sick, injured, or otherwise frightened.
- Remember that livestock draw upon past experiences and treatment when reacting to a situation.
- Train new workers and handlers before allowing them to work with livestock.

The majority of the time, accidents with livestock are the result of human error rather than an animal problem. A lapse in judgement, inexperience, or unpreparedness are major causes of accidents with livestock. Many times, handlers attempt jobs that require more assistance than is available. Whatever the reason, many accidents can be avoided if handlers use common sense, follow safety guidelines, and make every effort to understand livestock behavior.

References

- www.ae.iastate.edu/safety
- www.agsafe.org
- www.cdc.gov/niosh
- www.grandin.com

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