

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information,
Contact: Wendie Powell
Livestock Production Agent, Wildcat Extension District
wendiepowell@ksu.edu, (620) 784-5337

Cattle Handling

You've heard of horse sense. To get cattle to do what you want, it takes knowledge of animal behavior, access to good facilities, and proper handling techniques. All of this together adds up to cow sense!

Animal-related injuries can be due to preoccupation, impatience, or frustration by the animal or the handler. During these moments, a livestock handler really needs to understand animal behavior. Well-designed facilities won't make up for a lack of cow sense. Not understanding how cattle perceive their world can make for a long day for you, AND for your cattle. For example, a styrofoam cup that has fallen into the working alley can make cattle balk. A shadow or a flapping shirt on a post or some other distraction can prevent a smooth cattle flow. If you are having trouble working a set of cattle, try looking at the world from their perspective.

Cattle see the world differently than we do. A cow can probably see more than you do and is often distracted by motion off to the side. However, she doesn't see the world as clear and sharply focused as humans see it, and it takes her more time to process what she has seen. Cattle have panoramic vision. They can see nearly 300 degrees around them, and only have a blind spot directly in the back of their heads. Human vision, by comparison, is roughly 180 degrees; we have a much larger blind spot.

While their field of vision is practically unlimited, cattle have poor depth perception of nearby objects and limited vertical vision. They lower their heads to focus on something on the ground, because they only have about 60 degrees of vertical vision, compared to 140 degrees for humans. Due to their limitation in vertical vision and their lack of ability to focus quickly, a shadow on the ground appears to them to be a huge crack in the earth. Handlers can help reduce distractions and shadowing by taking these limitations into consideration and using a solid-sided working alley. Also, uniformity in the color of handling facilities will reduce balking. Curved, enclosed, and well-illuminated working facilities take advantage of these senses, along with the animal's strong desire to find an avenue of escape when confined.

Cattle also hear differently than humans. They can hear both lower volume and higher frequency sounds better than people. It may be the sound of your truck, with feed in it, more than the sight of your feed truck, which makes those cows “come a runnin’.” But the trade-off is that they have less ability to locate the source of a sound. People can pinpoint where a sound came from within 5 degrees, whereas cattle can only isolate the source down to about 30 degrees. Be mindful of cattle with severe sight problems, such as an advanced case of cancer eye, as they will rely to a greater extent on their sense of hearing. Thus, they may suddenly swing around to investigate a noise.

For more information, contact Wendie Powell, Livestock Production Agent, (620) 784-5337, wendiepowell@ksu.edu.

#

K - State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer