



# MAFES Dawg Tracks

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## Safety Tips: Cattle Handling Safety

Handling cattle (livestock) is a dangerous activity. However, most farmers and ranchers don't realize or stop to think that the cattle or livestock handling is a source of danger. A number of serious injuries and a few deaths happen every year due to animal-related accidents. Livestock handlers are involved in many cattle-related activities that range from feeding, changing grazing locations, loading animals on trucks or trailers, artificial insemination, dehorning, vaccinations, grooming, and hoof care, just to name a few of them. Obviously there are many more that potentially can cause an injury.

The World Health Organization predicts that by the year of 2020, injuries will be responsible for more deaths, morbidity and disability than all communicable diseases combined (Murray & Lopez, 1998). Injuries account for 1 in 7 potential life-years lost worldwide, but by 2020 will account for 1 in 5. Developing countries will bear the brunt of this increase.

The weight of farm mammals varies from a few pounds in newborns to over 3,000 in adult bulls. Farm animals can cause injuries to animal handlers in a variety of ways. They can kick, bite, gore, trample, fall on, step on, knock down, crush or pin between other animals or farm structures, peck, scratch, throw or buck off, drag and ram or butt. Horses and cattle, rather than any single piece of farm machinery, are reported to be the leading cause of injury. The above facts bring us to the reason for this newsletter, which are tips to reduce the potential for injury to cattle handlers:

- ✓ Handling cattle roughly can cause damage to the carcass that is costly, but injury to a cattle handler is more costly.
- ✓ Experience and competent handlers know that their actions can affect cattle behavior. They use their knowledge to get cattle to do as they want, quietly, efficiently and safely.
- ✓ Non-experienced cattle handlers should be trained in the behavior and traits of handling animals. The first requisite is to having the training done by an experienced and competent senior handler.

### TIPS FOR CATTLE CONTROL-

Cattle have minds of their own, with a huge weight advantage and the ability to move surprisingly fast. Skill and practice are the keys to handling cattle successfully.

#### **Know your cattle-**

- Every herd has docile, flighty, nervous and aggressive animals.
- Different breeds have different temperaments.
- Cattle with sharp horns can be dangerous. Dehorning is recommended.
- Get familiar with the cattle you are dealing with.

#### **Keep cattle calm-**

- Approach cattle quietly and make sure they are aware of your presence. They can be dangerous when over-excited.
- Give them time to settle down after moving them or unloading from a truck or trailer. (30- mins. depending on the distance they travelled)

- Cattle normally are easier to handle if they are familiar with their location.
- Cattle, especially young ones fed in the yards and quietly moved through the lots, are easier to handle in the future.

#### **Assess the Type of Stock and their Behavior-**

- Cattle are more unpredictable in cold, windy weather.
- Their age, breed, sex, horn status, temperament, training and weight can affect their behavior.
- An isolated animal (from sickness) can be stressed and more aggressive.

**Bulls-** Bulls are more aggressive during mating season and extremely dangerous when fighting.

- Never trust any bull- especially one that is reared in isolation.
- Never work bulls on your own.
- Never trust a quiet bull, nor turn your back on one.
- The older the bull, the more dangerous it can be.
- Avoid working a bull with other bulls around.

**Cows & Calves-** Any cow, especially a beef cow is often more aggressive just after calving and **can't be trusted.**

- The younger the calf, the more dangerous the mother.
- Avoid having a dog with you when working cows and calves.
- Avoid situations where you will get between the mother and a newborn calf with some type of barrier between you and them. This is especially important when weighing or identifying a newborn calf.

#### **Keep an eye on what is going on around you-**

- When you are fronting one animal, look around to be cognizant of the others around you.

#### **Know when to use your voice or a cane-**

- Carrying a cane or flapper may serve as a confidence builder, but use it as a guide and not one to flog the animal.
- Cattle have good memories; they remember how they are treated and where weaning and castration takes place. Gentle handling is important in these situations, especially with young cattle.

- **Check the lots for hazards before working with cattle- Check these hints for lot maintenance-**

Hammer nails home and saw off protruding bolts.

~Keep gates well- oiled and free swinging.

~Fasten down or replace rotten timbers.

~Keep gates and latches well- adjusted and aligned.

~Perform repairs immediately.

~Reduce dust by sprinkling or hosing down.

There are many other precautions with handling cattle, but space doesn't allow us to discuss all of them. However, if the tips above are practiced and remembered, they will greatly reduce the risk of injury and allow the cattle handling tasks to be more enjoyable and error free. Other precautions in prior issues of the newsletter review other safety practices and tips.

**APPLY YOUR GOOD INTENTIONS  
TO ACCIDENT PREVENTION!  
BE ALERT ◆ ACCIDENTS HURT**