



Safe Handling of Farm Animals

Instructor: *The following script can be used to deliver a 15- minute training session to employees.*

POINTS TO EMPHASIZE

- Know sensitivity warning signs of animals.
- Know the characteristics of animal vision and hearing.
- Know safe livestock handling practices.

Sensitivity warnings

Lack of knowledge of animal characteristics and poor animal handling facilities and environments can result in a high potential for accidents. Workers must always be on guard when working with or around animals.

Most animal species have and display characteristic signs of fear, aggression and contentment. Astute handlers should be sensitive to such warnings evidenced by raised or pinned ears, raised tail, raised back hair, bared teeth, pawing the ground, and /or snorting.

Handling Methods

Most animals respond favorably to calm and deliberate movement and responses from a handler. Avoid loud noises and be patient. Never prod an animal when it has no place to go. Move slowly and deliberately around livestock, with the safest approach being to announce your approach through a touch to the animal's front side.

Respect rather than fear livestock. Animals will defend their territory and should be worked around keeping in mind that there is always the potential for harm.

Most animals are highly protective of their young. Be especially careful around newborn animals. Avoid getting between a cow and her new calf. Carry out all new born calf treatment in an area isolated from the cow. Extreme caution should be practiced when handling male animals.

Always provide an escape route, especially when working in close quarters, with sick, or injured animals, or under adverse conditions such as severe storms. Try to avoid entering a small-enclosed area with large animals unless it is equipped with a mangate that you can easily get to.

Exercise extra care around strange animals and use extreme care if strangers must be around your animals. Maintain equipment and facilities in good repair and exercise "good housekeeping practices."

Cattle and horses cannot see directly behind them, (blind spot) therefore sudden movements from behind will spook them, which may result in a "flight or fight" response.

Give dairy cattle a moment to adapt to the new environment before beginning your work.

Always work cattle from the hip, not behind, and keep out of sight unless needed.

Always approach a horse from the left, and from the front if possible. Speak softly when approaching, if behind, to let it know of your presence. When you are within reach, touch the horse first by gently stroking the shoulder or rump and move calmly towards the head.

Animal Facilities

Many injuries related to livestock handling could be directly attributed to inadequate facilities, equipment failures and poor building structures.

Tripping hazards can be encountered such as high door sills. Working in narrow or cluttered alleyways, and on uneven walking surfaces can also be dangerous.

Concrete floors are best for livestock. Floor ramp and step finishes should be roughened to prevent slipping under wet conditions. High traffic areas, such as alleyways, should be grooved. Floors should be constructed to allow water to drain quickly. Slatted floors can be used to keep animals dry in a confinement system.

Fencing and gates should be strong and durable to contain crowded livestock. Alleys and chutes should be wide enough for the animal to pass, but not wide enough for the animal to turn around. Animals are less likely to balk in chutes constructed with solid walls instead of fencing materials.

Lighting should be even and diffused to eliminate glare. Animals generally move readily from dark areas into well-lighted areas but are reluctant to move from lighted areas into dark areas. Bright spots and shadows tend to

make animals skittish, especially in crowded or loading areas. Animal facility layouts should be designed so animals do not look directly into the sun when being moved.

Appropriate handling equipment can reduce injuries to animals and humans and save labor and time during various phases of production. For example, adequate equipment can reduce time needed for feeding, medical care/treatment, loading animals for market “housekeeping”, data recording, etc.

Personal Protective Equipment

Workers should always wear steel-toed boots when working with animals, and protective gloves and other protective clothing when working with sick or hurt animals. A dust filter mask should be used where necessary to minimize respiratory hazards.

Are there any questions?

Finally, let’s take a moment to review some of the “Do’s and Don’ts” of handling farm animals.

DO:

- Know characteristics of animal vision and hearing
- Know sensitive warning signs.
- Maintain housekeeping.
- Touch animal gently.
- Avoid the kicking region when approaching an animal.
- Maintain even lighting.

DON’T:

- Expose animal to loud noises and quick movements
- Clutter alleyways and walking surfaces
- Enter a small enclosed area with an animal unless equipped with a man gate
- Overcrowd pens or chutes

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