

Safely Working With and Around Farm/Ranch Animals: Script

AgSafe, Coalition for Health and Safety in Agriculture¹

The following safety module is intended to be used as a refresher safety awareness session and is in no way to be used as a substitute for job training nor proper equipment use.

One in three injuries on the farm/ranch involve handling or contact with large animals. Animal movements are generally unpredictable, so learn to recognize the signs of fear, pain and stress in the animals with which you work.

The safety modules may be used by anyone with the understanding that credit be given to AgSafe.

APPROACH ANIMAL SAFELY

The proper approach to large animals is critical to working with them safely. Most large animals can see at wide angles around them, but there is a blind spot directly behind their hind quarters which they cannot see. Any movement in this "blind spot" will make the animal uneasy and nervous. The safest approach is to "announce" your approach through a touch to the animal's front or side. (See Figure 1.) Most large animals will kick in an arch beginning toward the front and moving toward the back. Avoid this kicking region when approaching the animal.

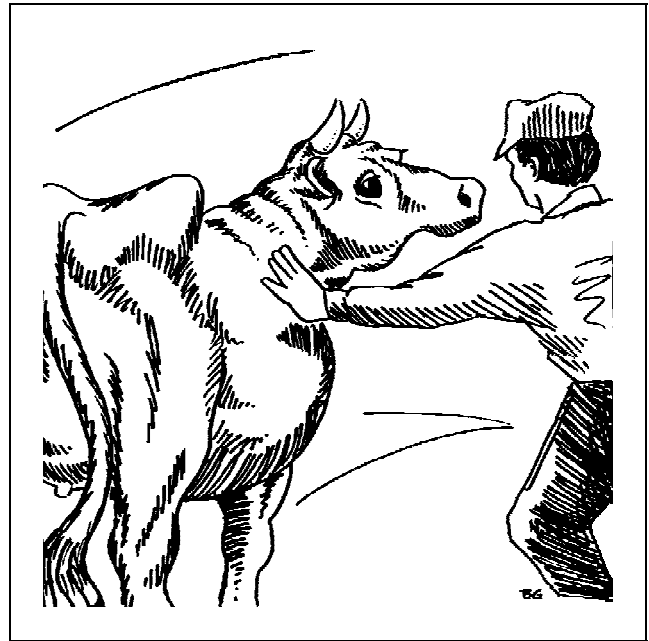


Figure 1. "Announce" your approach by touching the animal's front or side

SEPARATE CATTLE SAFELY

As one large cow can weigh up to 1500 lbs, it is not a good idea to try to manually separate cows using gates or boards. A frightened cow or horse will plow right over you. It is safer to use proper handling facilities made specially for separating large animals. (See Figure 2.) Most animals will be more cooperative in moving through a chute that has minimal distractions.

1. 140 Warren Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

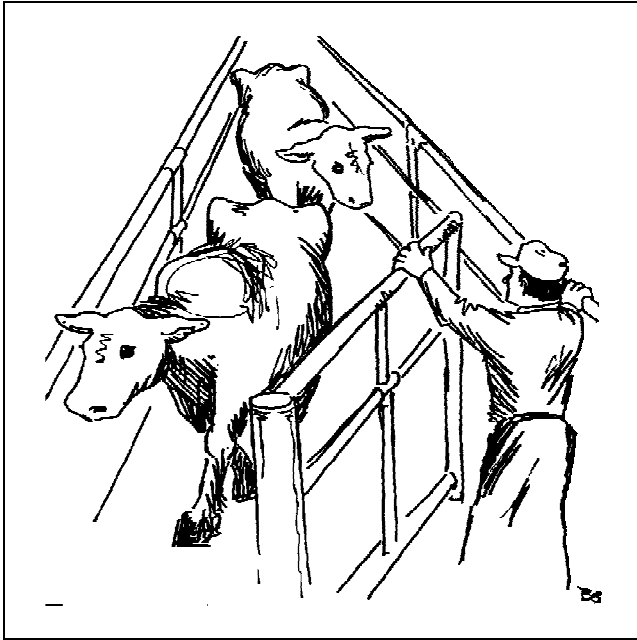


Figure 2. Use proper handling facilities to separate large animals

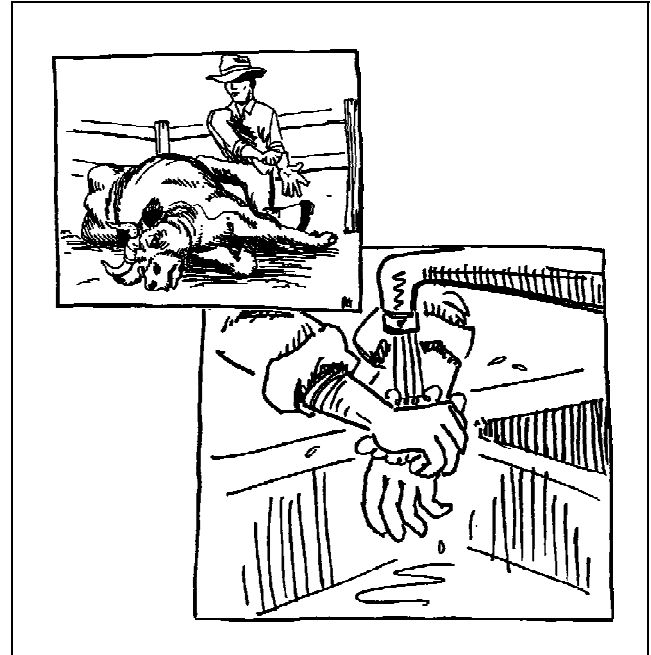


Figure 4. When working with sick animals, protect yourself by wearing gloves and, afterward, washing

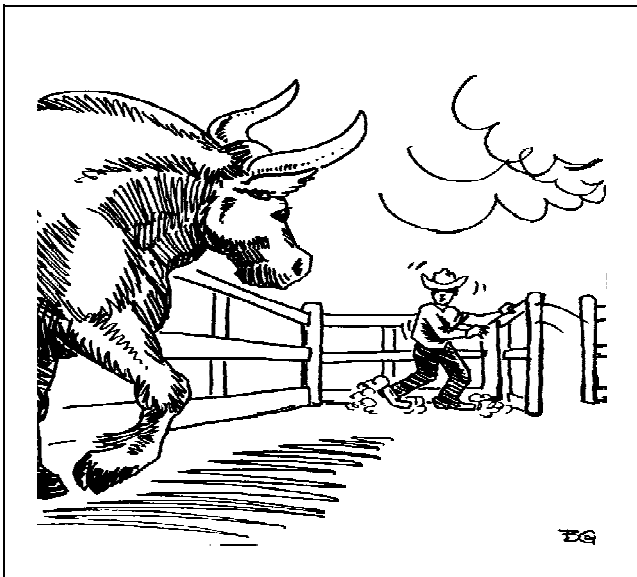


Figure 3. Leave yourself an "out"

LEAVE YOURSELF AN "OUT"

When you are inside a handling facility or milking lane, always leave yourself a way to get out if it becomes necessary. (See Figure 3.) Try to avoid entering a small enclosed area with large animals unless it is equipped with a mangate that you can get to easily.

BE CAREFUL AROUND SICK/HURT ANIMALS

When working with sick and hurt animals be sure to protect yourself from any animal-borne diseases such as undulant fever, tetanus, rabies, etc. Wear rubber gloves and other protective clothing for protection, and practice good hygiene by washing your hands and face after handling animals. (See Figure 4.)

PRACTICE GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Keeping your work area clean and free of debris will help provide a safe working environment. (See Figure 5.) Check for and eliminate any sharp corners or protrusions in walkways. Check to ensure that all latches and levers can't fly open easily. Clean concrete ramps and floors regularly to prevent slips and trips. Keep pitch forks and other sharp tools stored properly out of walkways.

MAINTAIN EVEN LIGHTING

Shadows mixed with light spots inside handling facilities will increase the animal's fear and tension. Try to keep the lighting in these moving areas dispersed evenly. (See Figure 6.)

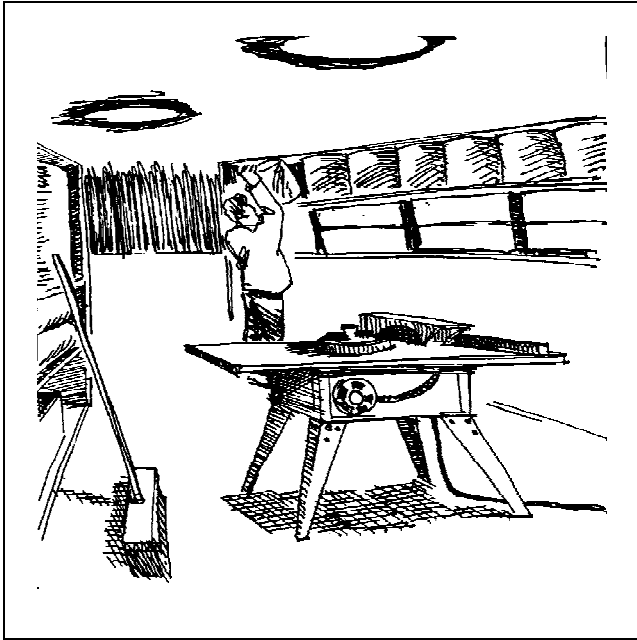


Figure 5. Practice good housekeeping

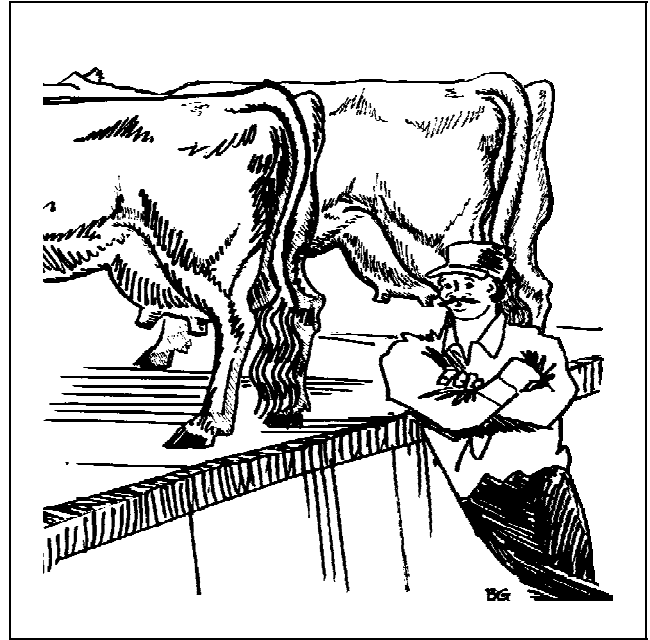


Figure 7. Give dairy cattle a chance to adapt to a new environment

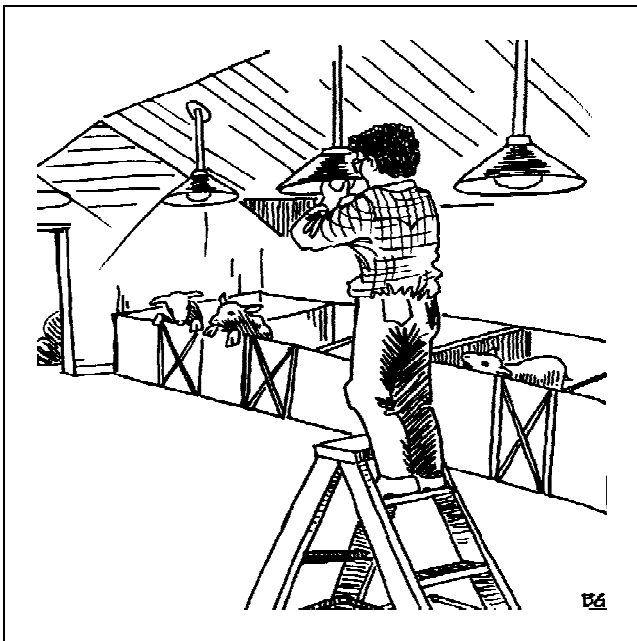


Figure 6. Maintain even lighting

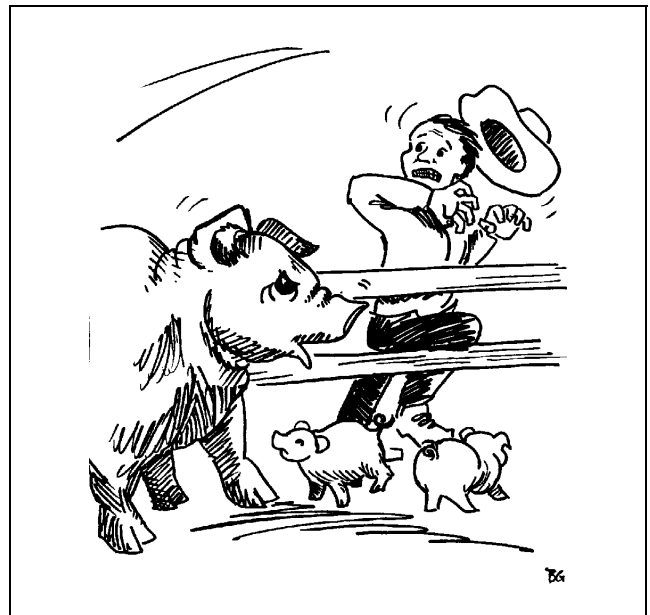


Figure 8. Sows may become dangerous when protecting their young

WORKING SAFELY WITH DAIRY CATTLE

Dairy cattle are generally more nervous than other animals, so it's important to approach these animals gently to avoid startling them. Once you have moved dairy cattle into the milking stalls, give them a moment to adapt to the new environment before beginning your operation. (See Figure 7.)

SAFELY WORKING WITH SWINE

Though hogs are not normally aggressive animals, they can become dangerous animals if threatened, especially sows protecting their young. (See Figure 8.) The best method by which to move hogs is by guiding hogs combined with gates and/or panels. Announce your approach to hogs as you do with other animals. Do not walk up to them quietly and surprise them.