

Livestock Safety

Farmers know the dangers of working with machinery, the leading cause of death and injury in the nation's most hazardous occupation. A recent 15-state summary of farm accidents shows that animals were a factor in about one of every eight injuries reported, ranking second to farm machinery in total number of cases. Livestock related injuries are serious and involve considerable loss of time, money and productivity and account for just under 100 deaths per year.

Animals have been a part of agriculture since primitive times. Being both fond of and dependent on them, we dislike viewing them as potentially dangerous. Therefore, preventing animal-related accidents is an important part of agricultural safety.

Injuries identified with livestock, include bites, kicks or situations in which the farmer gets pinned between the animal and a farm building, implement or other fixed object. The best way to avoid livestock injuries is to understand animal behavior. Only by knowing their animals, and what to expect in certain situations can farmers protect themselves and others from injury

LIVESTOCK BEHAVIOR

Under fairly uniform conditions, livestock often do the same thing each day at a specific time. Part of this is caused by habit formation, such as when cows gather around the barn just before milking time.

Habits also are caused by regular changes in environmental conditions, such as temperature or humidity fluctuations when daylight turns to darkness. Animals are most active at the time of greatest change, such as at dawn or dusk. They will be least active either in the middle of the day or the middle of the night.



Learned behavior patterns enable animals to adjust to changes in their environment. Most animals have a variety of established behavior patterns that can be expressed when their environment changes. Animals learn to apply one behavior over another, according to which one produces the most comfortable situation.

All domesticated animals have strong maternal instincts. Most animals show few, if any, maternal instincts during the initial part of the pregnancy, but change abruptly after giving birth. Livestock should be handled with extreme caution during calving season. Remember: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED TO HAPPEN.

Domesticated animals try to protect territories, as do animals in the wild. Farmers may see this by an animal's aggressive behavior during feeding. To keep livestock from fighting at the feed trough, distribute feed in large unpredictable patches. Avoid uniform distribution, or placing specified amounts in areas for certain animals.

Animals can adapt to farm environments but there many factors that influence behavior. Study livestock and take note of individual tendencies. Understand which factors influence animal behavior and know what to expect. Only then can farm workers reduce the risk of injuries associated with farm animals.

LIVESTOCK HANDLING

Any operation involving restraint of an animal or sorting and loading is less hazardous if solid facilities are available. Makeshift gate arrangements and rope restraints can lead to injury of

both the animal and the human worker. Your insurance company paid for 40 head of livestock and over \$34,000 for loading and unloading of livestock losses last year.

Handling facilities deserve careful planning for efficiency as well as for safety. Animals will move more willingly through a chute if they cannot see excitement up ahead. Facility design should be such that it is never necessary for workers to enter a small or enclosed area with the animals. All holding pens should be equipped with a man-gate or other means of quickly vacating the pen if necessary. Crowding into sorting or working chutes can usually be done with a crowd gate, not with drivers.

Catwalks along chutes and alleys eliminate the need for working in the alley. If the catwalk is more than 18" or so off the ground, a guardrail to prevent falls should protect it. Walking or working surfaces should be free of tripping and slipping hazards. Check for protrusions, sharp corners or pinch points that could cause injury and then eliminate them.

Head gates and squeeze chutes can be the scenes of excessive animal excitement. Make-shift latches and levers can fly open inflicting serious injuries. Commercially designed and manufactured facilities at these key points can improve both efficiency and safety.

LIGHTING

Facility lighting should be even and diffused. Bright spots mixed with shadows in alleys and crowding pens will often cause cattle to balk. Lighting in the squeeze and loading chute areas should be at least 10 footcandles. Guard the moving parts of a hydraulically operated squeeze chute and tilt table. Use solid panels for moving swine. Never prod animals if they have no place to go. As both cattle and hogs are very sensitive to noise, keep the decibel level down as low as possible.

LIGHTNING

Lightning is Farmers Union Mutual Insurance's largest cause of livestock losses. Last year we paid for over 300 head of livestock and almost \$200,000 in losses. There are few precautions

that can be taken in order to prevent lightning losses on livestock. If lightning strikes are a problem to your livestock, please consider the following options:

- 1) Remove or ground trees in pastures.
- 2) Keep livestock away from high points during storms, if possible.
- 3) Ground wire fences. Current can travel up to two miles through a wire fence, which could be harmful to both livestock and humans.
- 4) Trust only an experienced installer to do the work. Lightning protection is not a do-it-yourself job.

PREVENT LOSSES

In North Dakota, Farmers Union Mutual Insurance paid for over 90 head of livestock and a total of over \$62,000 in 2000 for livestock that drowned.

Stock dams filled to capacity, along with swollen rivers and streams increase the danger of livestock losses due to the peril of drowning. Past experience reveals a substantial number of newborn calves have been lost after falling into the icy water and drowning. Most livestock drowning losses can be prevented if precautions are taken.

A regular check or inspection will save livestock bogged down or stuck in a water hole, stock dam, creek or slough. It is surprising how many losses we note where a prolonged struggle has occurred before the animal drowned.

Don't feed livestock on the ice. During calving season, cows should be kept away from creek bottoms, rivers, or places known to have abrupt drop-offs and steep embankments to prevent newborn calves from falling and drowning in icy waters.

Try to keep livestock away from watering holes and ponds over two feet deep to eliminate their falling through weakened ice. Keep a close watch on livestock to save them from becoming stuck in water holes, and stock dams.