

Rules For Handling Cattle

Convincing cattle to do what you want them to do, when you want them to do it, is often an impossible, labor intensive job. With the heavy work season for handling cattle already in full swing, here are a few pointers to ponder regarding your "patients."

Proper treatment of cattle reduces stress and abuse of both people and animals. Often, the major deterrents to proper cattle handling are cowboys, the horses they ride and especially the "cow" dog they bring along for extra harassment. Improved cattle handling begins with the rejection of an anthropomorphic approach to cattle and a sensitivity to their habitual nature. Working corrals should be located or designed in ways that take advantage of a cow's nature.

Some **RULES** for handling cattle are:

Round: Cattle tend to move in circles but bunch up in corners. Incorporation of circular pens and curved crowding alleys keeps cattle "flowing."

Up: Cattle tend to move upgrade easier than downgrade. Crowding alleys work better when cattle are moving on an upward slope. Cattle will exit quieter and easier from squeeze chutes oriented on an upward slope but tend to jump and be more anxious if exiting downgrade. This rule and the following one may help with location decisions when pens are constructed or when portable corrals are installed.

Light: Cattle tend to move toward light when disturbed and are suspicious of dark enclosed areas. Squeeze chutes placed at or near the exit of barns or treatment facilities encourage movement of cattle towards and into the chute.

Easy: Cattle tend to remain in a holding chute with a degree of calmness or anxiety proportional to the "force" exerted to advance them into the chute. Decreased jostling and excitement results in less stress and less stressed behavior.

Same-way: Cattle are creatures of habit. They live to do tomorrow that which they did today, at the same time of day. A "cowpath" is testament that cows continually prefer to go from point A to point B using a similar route.

Cow behavior differs from people behavior and is more predictable. However, because cows are easily trained, they may soon become "crazy" or as "wild" as the person who handles them. Feeding cattle at the same location, at the same time of day, for a few consecutive days creates a strong "pattern" of behavior.

Cattle can be enticed into working corrals for estrus detection, insemination, or treatment by taking advantage of their easily created habits. Considering the weight and dexterity of cattle, conventional fences are not impenetrable barriers but rather "psychological deterrents" that give cattle boundaries. People who push cows towards these fences should not be surprised when cows go over, under or through them. Cows that jump over fences are not stupid. However, cowboys who "train" them to do so are foolish.