



WORKING WITH LIVESTOCK



Top tips

- Take the time to understand/know the behaviours of the livestock you are working with. Make sure they are handled by trained and agile workers.
- Make sure your working area is safe and has safety measures in place. E.g. good handling facilities for example adequate gates, a well maintained crush, fence heights appropriate for the animals being managed. etc.
- Always have an escape route or refuge for emergency situations while working with animals
- Stop disease/infection passing from animals to humans by ensuring you have good personal hygiene practices and wear the correct PPE when working with animals.
- Always be careful around cows and heifers with new-born calves and NEVER turn your back on a cow following calving.

The most recent HSE annual workplace fatality statistics, reported that being killed by an animal is the second highest cause of death in farming (annual average over last 5 years). A total of 28 people lost their lives over the past five years as a result of being injured by cattle and bulls. Handling cattle and livestock always involves risks: the risk of being hurt physically by an animal that is frightened or has been startled and the risk of being hurt due to poorly throughout handling facilities, the misuse of equipment or failing to maintain.

Many farmers never stop to consider why animals behave as they do and, more importantly, what this behaviour could mean to their personal safety. Animal-handling practices are often inherited from watching others and from personal experiences growing up on the farm. Too often, this results in unsafe livestock handling and restraint practices.

Although most animal incidents are not fatal, many men, women and children are needlessly injured every year due to unwise risk taking. Broken bones, crushed and mashed limbs, work absences and unnecessary medical expenses are some of the results of livestock-related incidents so it is important to think about improving livestock handling systems and making them safer and more efficient.

Before starting the task stop and think...

- Ensure only persons authorised and familiar with cattle or those undergoing supervised training are allowed to enter the cattle barns/pens/parlour and handle the cattle, especially if this involves working with any bulls.
- Where possible ensure there are two people present, especially if you are trying to separate an animal from the rest of the herd or handling bulls.
- Consider the risk to persons over 65 years or if someone has reduced agility– they may not be able to move out of the way quickly when necessary..
- No children under 13 should be allowed to enter cattle housing or handle cattle.

Remember

Discuss the risks regularly with the whole team, and train everyone in safe working methods, and emergency procedures.

Make sure everyone carries a mobile phone with them and have the relevant emergency information and emergency contact numbers programmed into them. Keep the mobile phone with you.

Want to know more?

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais35.pdf>
HSE Farmwise <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg270.htm>



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FARM SAFETY FOUNDATION

Handling Facilities

- Ensure there are proper handling facilities, including a well-maintained and designed holding pens and race, and a crush that are in good working order. Makeshift gates and hurdles are not sufficient, and will result in less efficient handling as well as risking injury
- Plan an escape route out of a pen/barn if an animal suddenly charges you.
- Consider tethering the cow you are checking – halters and ropes may be useful but will normally require specially instructed users. Always use suitable ropes – do not improvise with bale string or similar.

The Race

- Can animals readily enter the race, which should have a funnel end, and is there is enough room in the collecting pen for them to feed into the funnel easily? A circular collecting pen allows staff to stand safely behind a forcing gate as they move animals into the race, and keeps the animals moving;
- Can animals see clearly to the crush and beyond, so they will readily move along the race, which may be curved, but should not include tight turns. Animals will be more prepared to move towards a light area than into the dark;
- Are the sides of the race high enough to prevent animals from jumping over them and are they are properly secured to the ground and to each other? Sheeting the sides helps to keep cattle moving by reducing visual disturbances such as shadows and shields them from other animals;
- Can you the lead animal in the race while it waits its turn in the crush. Hinged or sliding doors are suitable, but be sure they are operated from the working side of the race so the operator does not have to reach across it to close the gate. No one should work on an animal in the crush with an unsecured animal waiting in the race behind.

Bulls

Take extra precautions when handling bulls:

- All bulls should be kept in a purpose-made bull pen. Ensure external doors and gates are locked or otherwise secured to prevent unauthorised access. Catches should be stock proof.
- Where possible feed and water from outside the pen, e.g. through a feeding hatch.
- Where possible include an outside area for the bull to go in, to allow bedding up or cleaning the inside.
- Display safety signs warning of the presence of a bull at the entrance to any building where the bull is kept.
- Arrange your race, crush and loading areas so that no one ever needs to be in them with the animals.
- Keep yard or farm perimeter gates closed when loading bulls to contain an escaped animal within the yard or farm.

The Crush

- Does the crush have a self-locking front gate and yoke to allow the animal's head to be firmly held? Additional head bars will prevent the animal tossing its head up and injuring people;
- Does it have a rump rail, chain or bar to minimise forward and backward movement of the animal. Make sure this is always used;
- Is it secured to the ground or, if mobile, to a vehicle;
- Is it positioned to allow you to work safely around it, without the risk of contact with other animals, and have good natural or artificial lighting;
- Do the gates etc. open smoothly with the minimum of effort and noise?
- Is the crush floor slip-resistant, made of sound hardwood bolted into place (nails are not suitable), metal chequer-plate, or with a rubber mat over the base? Consider the need for shedder gates after the crush to allow animals to be sorted into groups. Work around the crush will be more convenient if it is under cover with a workbench nearby (for documentation, veterinary medicines, instruments etc.) Specialised tasks, such as belly or foot trimming, require a purpose-designed crush with adequate restraint and enough room to work safely.

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