



Low-Stress Cattle Handling & Cattle Handling Facilities

Beneficial Categories



Background

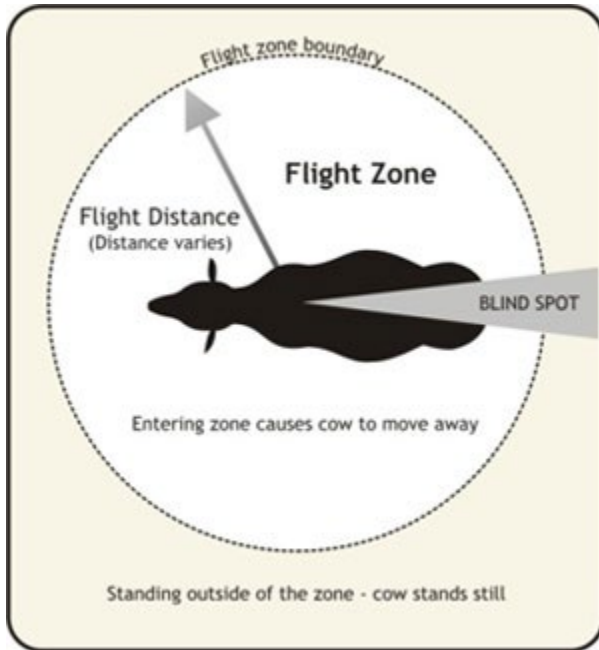
Cattle handling is an integral part of raising cattle. Poor cattle handling can increase stress and risk of injuries for both cattle and people. The safety of humans and animals on farm needs to be a top priority at all times. Learning and understanding low-stress handling techniques and investing in good quality cattle handling systems help promote a safer work environment and result in more relaxed and productive cattle. Previous studies in 2009 and 2011 have shown that an increase in cattle stress and blood cortisol levels can reduce cattle immunity and reduce weight gain. Increased stress in cattle can also have negative reproductive consequences for both cows and bulls according to a 2020 review study. Implementing low-stress handling to reduce the stress levels of cattle during handling is a cost-free management change that can reduce the risk of profit loss.

Adopting Low-Stress Handling Techniques

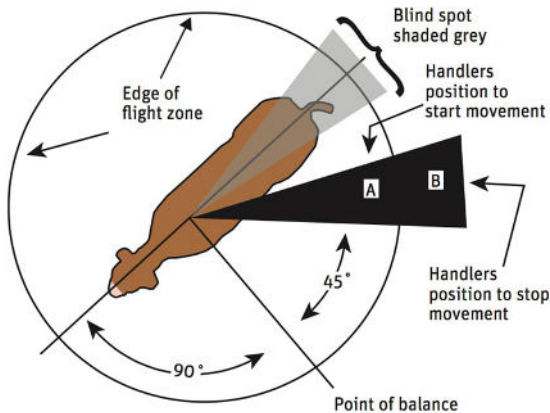
Both Bud Williams and Dr. Temple Grandin are considered pioneers in the field of low-stress cattle handling methods and the importance of well-designed cattle handling systems. to increase safety for the animal and the person working them. To become knowledgeable in low-stress handling it is important to understand the behaviour of cattle and why they move and act in certain ways. An experienced handler can learn to expect many predictable animal reactions in a variety of situations. The main goal is to move cattle to the desire location while minimizing stress and ensuring safety for both cattle and humans. The fastest way to move cattle is not always the best or easiest way. There is less risk of injury to animals and personnel when cattle can be moved quietly and calmly. The best way to learn new handling techniques is to watch someone else use them. This resource describes some basic techniques, however, it may be beneficial to seek out a training course to learn from an experienced handler.

Cattle have a wider field of vision than humans but they have a blind spot located directly behind them and can become alarmed when a person enters their blind spot. Cattle also have designated flight zones

and will move away from you to keep you out of their flight zone. Low-stress cattle handling uses this information to get cattle to move with slight on and off pressure in and out of the flight zone.



CATTLE HANDLING



Source: United States Beef Quality Assurance Cattle Care and Handling Guidelines |
DIANNA ROSKO GRAPHIC

Low-stress handling techniques are used mostly for moving cattle between pastures, to the handling system for sorting, and any other time cattle need to be moved from one area to another. When moving cattle there are important factors to consider in order to minimize injury risk and maintain lower stress levels.

- Work with another person if possible
- Cattle will follow the leader because of their herd instinct
- Avoid quick movements and loud noises
- Cattle will more easily move from a darker place to a lighter place

- Cattle will move in the opposite direction to the direction the handler is moving
- Entering the flight zone will cause cattle to move away
- The ideal point of balance for moving the animal is from the shoulder or chest area
- Do not chase cattle from the rear of the group as you will then be in their blind spot
- To get cattle to move forward or backward, walk past the animal in the direction opposite to the direction you want them to move
- Do not overcrowd alleys
- Avoid electric prods and physical force

Reading about techniques to use for low-stress handling is not the easiest way to learn. In-person training or videos are ideal to see the techniques in action. There are many videos available online; search "low-stress cattle handling". Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

[Go Slow to Get Ahead with Low-Stress Cattle Handling](#)

[Tips for Low-Stress Cattle Handling](#)

[Low-Stress Cattle Handling for Productivity and Safety](#)

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and Keystone Agricultural Producers of Manitoba have created an [in-depth manual](#) with six modules to learn about low-stress cattle handling.

Basic Cattle Handling Systems

All beef cattle operations should have equipment or facilities to aid in safe handling, restraint, treatment, and the loading and unloading of cattle. When cattle inevitably require hands-on treatment, they should be properly and securely restrained to allow safe access.

Having good handling systems has many benefits including:

- Increased safety for cattle and humans
- Reduced handling time required
- Reduced cattle injury or stress during hands-on treatment
- Better cattle movement
- Less manpower required to handle and treat cattle

Regardless of the number of cattle, there are general designs that make a handling system better including:

- A collection alley to move cattle from pens, pasture or the barn
- Sorting pens either after the collection alley or after the chute/headgate
- Crowding pen or tub to move smaller groups of cattle into the working area
- Single file working chutes (curved or not) of at least 20 feet (6 metres)
- Squeeze or headgate
- Loading chute

Depending on your operation size and type, you can design many of these handling systems to better meet your needs. There are also a variety of systems that can be customized to fit your budget. When deciding on a layout and any additional customizations, you can find examples online and price them out with a local company of your choice. If you are designing new facilities, they should be designed to

fit your herd, but also consider potential future expansion needs. Portable handling facilities may be the best fit for your operation's needs.

Potential Economic Costs/Benefits

Adoption of low-stress handling techniques does not necessarily have associated costs. There are many free online manuals and videos to help with training. The prices for in-person courses will vary but they are typically inexpensive. Adopting low-stress handling techniques can have many economic benefits to an operation including:

- Faster weight gain
- Reduced risk of disease and subsequent treatment cost
- Reduced risk of injury to humans and cattle
- Less risk of reducing cattle reproductive performance from stress or injury

The cost of updating or purchasing new cattle handling systems will vary depending on the system type, brand and size required. A benefit of reducing the time required to process your cattle by improving your handling systems may free up time for other tasks. Improving safety for cattle and humans by using proper handling facilities is invaluable.

Financial Incentives

Saskatchewan

The government of Saskatchewan has a rebate system for updating livestock equipment ending March 15, 2023. Visit the [Beef Cattle – Assurance System Producer Program website](#) to determine if you are eligible.

For more information on low-stress cattle handling and cattle handling facilities, visit the links below:

[Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture – Low-Stress Cattle Handling](#)

[Verified Beef Production Plus – Animal Care Section 5](#)

[Government of Alberta – Corrals for Handling Beef Cattle](#)

[On Pasture – Improve your Stockmanship by Understanding the Flight Zone](#)

[Government of Ontario – Cattle Handling Facilities](#)

[Noble Research Institute – Cattle Handling Facilities](#)

[Burdick, N., Randel, R., Carroll, J., Welsh, T. 2011. Interactions between Temperament, Stress, and Immune Function in Cattle. International Journal of Zoology. 1-9.](#)

[Fernandez-Novo, A., Perez-Garnelo, S., Villagra, A., Perez-Villalobos, N., Astiz, S. 2020. The Effect of Stress on Reproduction and Reproductive Technologies in Beef Cattle – a Review. Animals, 10: 2096. 1-23.](#)