

Livestock Safety

Overview

Children, especially those who are around livestock on the farm, often want to experience the joys of petting and being around livestock. Many do not have the necessary body size or strength to work with larger livestock safely. Knowledge of livestock and their behaviors are an important step towards being safe around livestock. This module addresses livestock safety with an emphasis on safe handling procedures, when to stay away from livestock, and how easily livestock are startled. It contains a display board and a curriculum.

Objective

The objective is to show when youth are physically capable of working with livestock safely, how they should behave around livestock and dangers that exist when working with or around livestock.

Introduction

- Introduce yourself to the students; let them know your name, background, and anything else they may be interested in that can tie into the presentation.
- Make students aware that the information you will present to them is very important, and that they need to pay attention.
- Introduce the Topic of Livestock Safety
- Students all have their own stories and experiences to tell.
- If it is a relevant question, ask the students if they have had any experience with livestock before. Let students comment on this as time allows. Lead this comment into different questions, including:
 - How do you work with Livestock?
 - Are animals on the farm powerful?
 - Can livestock be dangerous?
 - Make sure these and other questions are age-appropriate. Use your own judgment and make adjustments as necessary.

Activity

Materials Needed

- Toy Cow and Calf or live bottle calf from nearby farm.
- Livestock tri-fold safety poster

Introduction

Introduce the topic of livestock safety. Below are interesting facts you can use:

- One of every five youth injuries occurring on farms is animal-related, the majority involving horses or cattle.
- Cattle and horses were responsible for 57% and 29% respectively of the injuries. Half of the cattle injuries occurred while the animal was confined for veterinary/medical procedures or for loading and transport.
- In 2002, more than 13,400 children ages 14 and under were treated in emergency rooms for equestrian-related injuries.
- Nearly 40 percent of equestrian injuries result in hospitalization. Head injury is the most common cause of equestrian-related death and serious injury.

- Children ages 14 and under are more likely to suffer head injuries when thrown from a horse if they are not wearing equestrian helmets.
- Young females have a horse related injury rate three times higher than males, which differs from other types of on-farm injuries where males generally experience more injuries than females.
- Working with cattle was identified by youth (10–14 years) living on farms in Australia as more than twice as hazardous as horses.
- More than one third of all injuries that occurred on dairy farms involved contact with cattle, with 5% occurring to youth under 15.
- Cattle related injuries were most commonly the result of being kicked or pushed by the cattle.
- A person’s arms and legs have been identified as the most frequent site of injury.
- Cattle were the primary source of injury in an estimated 1987 of the on-farm animal related injuries during 1998.
- Moving or herding cattle was the task most commonly being performed at the time of injury

Behavior

Animals experience hunger, thirst, fear, sickness, injury and strong maternal instincts. These motivators cause animals to react against you. They also develop individual behavior patterns such as kicking or biting.

Color Blind

Beef, swine and dairy cattle are generally colorblind and have poor depth perception.

This results in an extreme sensitivity to contrasts, which may cause an animal to balk at shadows or rapid changes from light to dark. ***(This is why animals will jump over shadows and ledges such as gutters in a dairy barn.)***

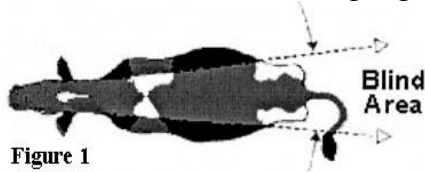
Sheep are also considered colorblind, but do have good depth perception. Instead, Sheep have difficulty picking out small details, such as the open space created by a partially opened gate.

Blind Spots

The proper approach to a large animal 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 hindquarters beyond which they cannot see. (See figure 1). Any movement in this “blind spot” will make the animal uneasy and nervous.

Horses and Mules commonly kick toward their hindquarters, while cow’s kick forward and out to the side. Cows also have a tendency to kick toward a side with pain from inflammation or injuries.

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 (See figure 2).



A frightened cow or horse will plow right over you. It is safer to use proper handling facilities made specially for separating large animals. Most animals will be more cooperative in moving through a chute that has minimal distractions.

The safest approach is to “announce” your approach through a touch to their front or side.

When you are inside a handling facility or milking lane, always leave yourself a way to get out if it becomes necessary.

Try to avoid entering a small area enclosed with large animals unless it is equipped with a man-gate that you can get to easily. Never prod animals if they have no place to go.

Maternal

Livestock with young exhibit a maternal instinct. They are usually more defensive and difficult to handle.

When possible, let the young stay as close to the adult as possible when handling.

Territorial

Most animals have a strong territorial instinct and develop a very distinctive, comfortable attachment to areas such as pastures and buildings, water troughs, worn paths and feed bunks. Forcible removal from these areas can cause animals to react unexpectedly.

Fast Movement

Moving or flapping objects can also disrupt handling. (Example: A cloth or coat swinging in the wind or turning fan blades can cause animals to jump or scare.)

Yelling should be kept to a minimum when working with livestock to enable the animal to feel secure.

Animals respond to the way they are treated and draw upon past experiences when reacting to a situation.

Considering these animal traits, it is easy to understand why animals often hesitate when going through unfamiliar gates, barn doors, and handling and loading chutes. Similar problems occur when animals are moved away from feed, separated from the herd or approached by an unfamiliar person.

Handling Farm Animals:

Tips on handling various farm animal species are listed below:

Cattle

- Accidents with beef cattle tend to occur while the victim is handling the livestock. Beef cattle are known for an even disposition, but can be startled, and inflict injury to anyone in their way. Groups of animals are easy to “spook.” Bovines can see nearly 360 degrees without moving their heads. Therefore, a quick movement behind is just as apt to “set them off” as a frontal one.
- Dairy cows may look contented in the pasture, but they are generally more nervous than other animals. Creatures of habit, they are easily startled, especially by strange noises and persons.
- Always announce your presence when approaching a cow. Gently touch the animal rather than let the first contact be a bump or shove.
- When moving cows into a constraining space such as a milking parlor stall or squeeze chute, give them time to adjust before starting the work at hand.
- If a cow tends to kick, consider using a hobble. Don’t permit workers to talk loudly, clatter and bang equipment around or handle cows roughly. Even gentle cows can become dangerous when defending calves and this fact should be impressed to children, visitors and new workers.
- Special facilities should be provided so that a bull can be fed, watered, exercised and used for breeding without the handler coming into direct contact with him.
- Once you have moved dairy cattle into the milking stalls, give them a moment to adapt to the new environment before beginning your operation. Although cattle are not apt to attack you, they can overwhelm you with their size and weight. Leave yourself an “out” when trying to corner or work with cattle.
- Keep small children and strangers out. Beware of the area in front of the rear leg when working with cattle. They tend to kick forward, then back. Pulling the kicking leg forward can be used as a means of preventing a kick while working in the udder or flank area range.

Swine

- Though hogs are not normally aggressive animals, they can become dangerous animals if threatened, especially a sow protecting her young.

- The best method by which to move hogs is by guiding them with gates and/or panels.
- Veterinary work and treatment of pigs should be done only when they are separated from the sow, or when she is restrained in the crate or a separate pen.
- Your best safety aid for moving swine is a lightweight hurdle or solid panel with a handle attached. The panel should be slightly narrower than the alleys through which the animals are being driven.
- As with most animals, make yourself known quietly and gently to avoid startling hogs. A knock on the gate or rattling the latch will usually suffice.
- Don't let small children reach through pens or fences to touch or feed hogs. The swine herdsman should keep unauthorized people out of pens or away from the facility altogether. Biosecurity can also be an important issue.

Horses

- Horses detect danger through their vision, sense of smell and keen sense of hearing. They have wide-angle vision, but they also have blind spots directly behind and in front of themselves. For example, when a horse lifts its head and pricks its ears, it is focusing on something far away. The horse lowers its head when focusing on low, close objects. Keep these blind spots in mind and know where your horse's attention is focused so you do not scare it.
- Your horse's ears will give you clues; they will point in the direction in which its attention is focused. Ears that are "laid back," or flattened backward, warn you that the horse is getting ready to kick or bite.
- When catching a horse, approach from its left shoulder. Move slowly but confidently, speaking to the horse as you approach. Read the horse's intention by watching its body language.
- When approaching from the rear, advance at an angle speaking to the horse, making sure you have its attention. Touch the horse gently as you pass by its hindquarters.
- Never walk under the belly of any horse.

Sheep safety

- A common accident involving sheep is being butted by a ram. Ewes will also protect their young and should be handled carefully. A sheep can be immobilized for safe handling by sitting it up on its rump on the ground.

What You Should Do!

Wear personal protective equipment

- Personal Protective Equipment appropriate to the work situation should be worn.

This could include:

1. Safety Glasses
2. Gloves
3. Long Trousers
4. Steel-toed Shoes or Boots
5. Shin Guards
6. Hard Hat (For riding Horses)

• It is important to wear the proper footwear when around livestock. Footwear that supplies the proper foot support and protection is essential. One misplaced hoof of a 1500-pound cow can easily break the bones of the human foot encased in a pair of *running shoes*.

• Wear rubber gloves when working with sick and injured animals as well as other protective clothing for protection.

• Tuck in a shirt or blouse.

Personal Hygiene

• Practice personal hygiene by washing your hands and face after handling animals with soap or a disinfectant.

Leading Livestock

• Never wrap a rope attached to a horse around your hand or waist, even with small loops, as it could wrap around the hand and cause serious injury.

• Be careful when approaching an animal that is preoccupied, such as when its head is in a feed trough.

• Don't walk in an animal blind spot as it may startle them.

• Never get between a mother and her baby even if the mother is calm.

• Never go in a pen or pasture containing livestock without an adult present.

• Speak to your animal and keep your hands on it when moving around. Even if the livestock is aware of your presence, it can be startled by quick movements.

• Clear area where working with livestock of loose debris and garbage.

Wrap-up

After the activity, talk with the students and discuss how they could possibly be injured by Livestock. Use the following discussion questions:

1. Why is it important not to have moving or flapping objects in working facilities?
2. Why is it dangerous to corner an animal?
3. Why should no one under 15 work with livestock alone?
4. Why should proper clothing be worn when working with livestock?
5. Why is it important to not loop a lead rope around your hand?
6. What can you do to prevent animal injuries?

Resources

Handling Farm Animals Safely

<http://www.minifarmhomestead.com/Critters/Handleanimals.htm>

Handling Farm Animals Safely

<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d001601-d001700/d001612/d001612.html>