

Farm Animal Safety

KEY POINTS

- Accidents with farm animals can be reduced following these guidelines.
- Do not threaten an animal's food supply while eating.
- Consider animal temperament, habits handling characteristics.
- Keep work areas clean and equipment in repair.
- Wear personal protective equipment appropriate.
- Keep children out of danger areas.
- Treat each animal as an unpredictable individual.
- Rely on experienced and trained help.

The first rule of farm safety is prevention. Whether you are operating equipment or working with animals, taking a few precautions and observing safety rules can save you precious time, prevent injury or even save your life. Removing hazards is one step toward a safe working environment. Another way is to know the correct way to work with animals and to follow good safety practices when doing so.

People are primarily injured by horses and cattle, although sheep and swine also are involved in many accidents. Three-fourths of the accidents reported

involve cattle or horses. They include kicks, being pushed or shoved, or from an animal's stumbling and falling or stepping on the worker.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Observing the animals to determine aggressiveness or signs of fear will alert one to the possibility of danger. These signs may be: ears raised or pinned, tail or hair on the back raised, bared teeth, pawing on the ground, and snorting. When working with confined cattle or horses, let them know where you are at all times, either by touching them or by talking to them.

Livestock facilities are the source of many accidents not directly related to handling livestock. Tripping hazards (such as high door sills, cluttered alleyways, and even walking surfaces) can cause painful injuries and considerable lost work time. Also, poor maintenance of corral (or pen) fencing and working chutes can result in a serious accident. If not properly treated, splinters from deteriorating fencing can cause painful infections. A protruding piece of lumber, a nail or a bolt can cause cuts or bruises; if backed or pushed into, they can cause a back injury.

Livestock handling equipment can be constructed that will reduce accidents when working livestock under confined conditions. A well-designed handling system can also speed up the cattle working operation, reduce time and labor requirements, and reduce the cost of operation.

Properly designed buildings and equipment improve the efficiency of a livestock operation, while ensuring the safety of workers and animals.

DISEASES

Both tame and wild animals can be a source of human illness and parasite infestation. Numerous diseases can be transmitted to man from cattle. Brucellosis, or

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bangs disease, called undulant fever in man, afflicts cattle, goats and swine. It can be transmitted from infected animals to man through raw milk, contact with an open sore or wound, from an aborted fetus or afterbirth, or from slaughtered carcasses.

Leptospirosis is a disease that can be spread to people through ponds and streams. Sick cattle infect the water with their urine, and people can catch leptospirosis by swimming in or drinking the polluted water. Once on a farm, the disease is difficult to eradicate.

Ringworm can be caught by touching a cow that has it. It looks like small round circles around the eyes, ears, muzzle and neck of the cow, and it is difficult to treat in humans.

CATTLE

Although milk cows may look contented in the pasture, they are generally more nervous than other animals. Creatures of habit, they are easily startled, especially by strange noises and persons. When approaching a cow, always announce your presence. Accidents involving dairy cattle usually occur as a result of their kicking, butting, trampling or crushing a worker.

While working cattle, hazards include rope burns and falls from a horse. One common sense practice when working with cattle is to keep calm and maintain as peaceful a scene as possible. Cattle are especially nervous when approached by strangers or small animals.

Accidents with bulls often occur when a previously docile animal suddenly becomes unmanageable. When handling bulls, use a staff and keep the bull in a strong pen that has emergency exits. The size and weight of cattle can be overwhelming.

Remember, cattle have 360 degree panoramic vision; they can see all around without turning their head. Cattle depend heavily on their vision, and are easily motivated by fear. Livestock are sensitive to harsh contrasts in light and dark around loading chutes, scales and work areas. Also, they are more sensitive to high pitched loud noises than people are.

HORSES

Most of the work-related horse accidents are a result of the rider's being thrown or falling from a horse, often resulting from kicking, stumbling or slipping on a wet surface.

Livestock recreation accidents usually involve the horse. Generally, the would-be rider is young and inexperienced, and riding a horse too spirited for him or her to control.

Dress properly for the ride — no loose or floppy garments to catch on branches or scare the horse. Footwear should have a deep heel. Make sure the girth or cinch is tight enough to keep the saddle from slipping. In leading a horse, walk beside it, not in front of it.

Never attach yourself to the horse by any tack or equipment. If you fall off, you could be dragged. When working around a horse's legs, stand to the side of the legs to avoid kicks. When loading or unloading a horse from a trailer or truck, always stand to one side of it. Never stand directly behind a horse. Lead a horse from its left side. Always turn the horse to your right so you keep it on the inside. Never wrap the lead strap, the halter shank, or the reins around your hands, wrists or body. Use a long lead strap which is folded "accordion" style in your left hand.

SWINE

Boars and sows with young litters can be especially dangerous because of their biting or slashing tusks. Feeder hogs may be dangerous to individuals unable to withstand their pushing and shoving. Hogs can be guided for sorting or moving by using a lightweight or solid panel. A hog can easily be guided backwards by placing a basket over its head. It will try to back out of the basket.

SHEEP

Rams weighing more than 300 pounds, and ewes at 150 to 200 pounds, can inflict painful injuries, primarily to people's ankles, knees and hips.

A ewe will stamp her foot and snort to get attention. She may butt if her newborn lambs seem threatened.

Relatively large numbers of sheep are often handled in small pens. Sheep are more likely to be considered companion animals than are cattle. As a result, handlers aren't always as cautious around sheep as they should be, particularly in routine feeding and management chores.