

# Low stress handling keeps cattle calm

Reducing stress when handling livestock will improve productivity and prevent physiological changes that could confound research and lower productivity. Handlers who understand livestock behavior can reduce stress," says Dr. Temple Grandin, professor of animal science at Colorado State University and a recognized authority on livestock handling systems.

In recent years, low stress handling has grown widely in acceptance and use, especially in the beef cattle industry. The late Bud Williams and his wife, Eunice, became known for their ability to successfully deal with difficult animals and eventually progressed into teaching others how to better handle domestic animals. In the past 20 years, their knowledge and methods have been passed on to thousands of people involved in the livestock industry.

Low stress livestock handling is possible when the handlers involved understand and apply their knowledge of animal behavior to get the desired responses. This allows them to move animals to where they want them to go.

Cattle are herd animals and prefer to stay together in their group. When one is separated from the herd, it becomes uncomfortable and excited and wants to return to the herd.

The key to getting livestock to move in the desired direction is to understand their flight zone and point of balance. The point of balance is straight out from the shoulder (90 degrees). When we move toward an animal, we are applying "pressure" and the animal will respond. In other words, the animal responds to our movement toward them. If pressure is applied toward the front of the shoulder, the animal goes



Doug Warnock

backwards or moves away. When pressure is applied behind the shoulder, the animal moves forward. The flight zone is the animal's "personal space." When the handler gets too close, into their space, the animal moves away. The size of the flight

zone varies according to the individual animal's tameness, or wildness, which is influenced by the amount and type of experience the critter has had with humans.

Loud noises, whips and electric prods tend to keep animals frightened and ready to bolt. A calm, cool approach to working animals without a lot of noise and excitement will get more positive response than the frenzied, loud, high energy, rodeo-like approach portrayed in the movies.

Animals learn from their

experiences. They quickly learn that a truck or tractor with a wagon means feed. They learn that being chased somewhere leads to fear and distress. They tend to be more stressed by being sorted out to move single-file through a chute than by the vaccination they get while in the chute. It is important that human handlers make the animals' first experience with handling or a new environment as stress-free as possible, so they will be more willing to do it again.

The way to become

proficient at handling livestock with minimal stress is to practice. Handlers need to take time to make sure the moves they make give the desired message to the animals, so that they respond appropriately. Low stress handling should be deliberate and quiet. There are a number of good references available on low stress livestock handling

and I would be happy to share them with anyone who wants to learn more.

Doug Warnock, retired from Washington State University Extension, lives on a ranch in the Touchet River Valley where he writes about and teaches grazing management. He can be contacted at [dwarnockgreenerpastures@gmail.com](mailto:dwarnockgreenerpastures@gmail.com).

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## Feedlots quickly selling beef, but slow buying

EO Media Group

Feedlots continue to roll out fed cattle but have slowed their purchases of feeder cattle, according to USDA's latest cattle on feed report.

Marketing of fed cattle from feedlots with 1,000-head capacity or more was up 5 percent in October year-over-year, while cattle placed into feedlots were down 5 percent, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

"The report showed a continuation, in part, of what we've been seeing — marketing is very strong," said Derrell Peel, extension livestock marketing specialist with Oklahoma State University.

While the report shows a 5 percent increase in marketing, there was one less business day this October — making it more like a 10 percent increase, he said.

As for lower placements, higher year-over-years placements started in February with only a drop-off in September. Feedlots have been pulling cattle ahead through the system, and marketing has been strong all year, he said.

Year-to-date, feedlot marketings are up an impressive 5.2 percent, as seen in continued strong slaughter numbers — up 5.6 percent year to date, he said.

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