

Handle with Care

As we move into fall, many farms are onboarding new staff to support daily operations. It is not uncommon now for farms to hire milkers or labour that have no previous experience working and handling cows. But, for people who work with the animal every day it can be difficult to explain how to handle these animals in a manner that keeps both the handler, other staff, and the animal safe. Below are a few quick points to think about discussing with any new, or even older employees!

How you react to these cow behaviours, and many others, can also shape your herds personality, and the ease of which it is for you to work with them. It is a line I think we are all familiar with; stressed cows do not make milk. In fact, stressed cows can lead to a buffet of other diseases, or issues that lead to you calling the vet out.

Main goals for any cattle handling experience can be summed up as follows:

- Low stress
- Safe
- Efficient

Cows are naturally prey animals. This drives their responses to you and your actions, but it also shapes them anatomically. Cows have their eyes placed on the side of their heads to give them roughly 340 degree vision around them. In front of them, their vision is binocular. Beside them, their vision is monocular, which essentially means they lack the ability to assess depth and shadows. And directly behind them is their blind spot. Never approach a cow from her blind spot.

Another thing to remind your staff about cows, is that they remember handlers and how they have been handled previously. An interesting piece of research showed that when a handler that previously handled the cows poorly (slapped, yelling) was milking, milk let down is reduced! Cows are not able to relax, which is needed for them to properly let their milk down! Thus, as a handler, what would be great methods to try to use to move and work with your cows?

Things to avoid:

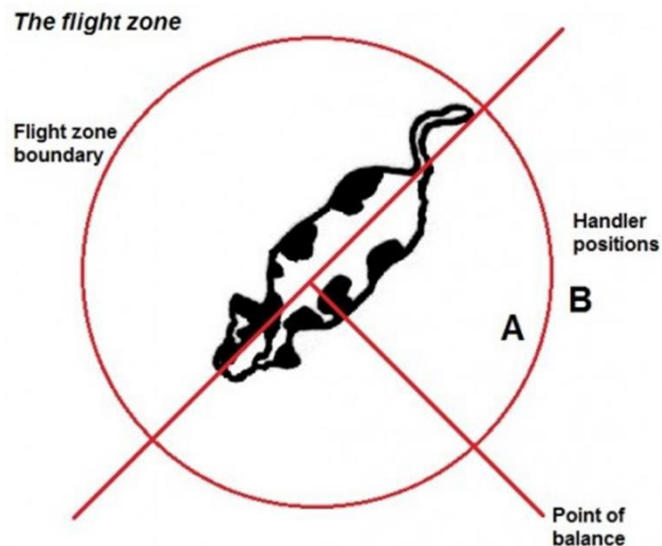
- Yelling
- Tail twisting
- Slapping/hitting

Methods to use:

- Point of balance
- Flight zone

Point of balance on a cow, is the point of her shoulder. How she reacts to you depends on which way you are approaching that point. Simply put, if you approach from in front of it, she will back up; approach from behind it, and she will move forward.

Flight zone is a circle surrounding the cow. Depending on the situation, cow temperament, experience with the handler, the age of the cow, and the speed you approach this circle all impact the size of it. Once you are in her flight zone her goal is to move away from you. This zone is present for not only free stall cows, but tie-stall animals as well, but for tie-stall cows the flight zone is much smaller.



Overall, it is super important to remember that how we handle cattle is a huge influence on their welfare, behaviour, and performance in your herd. This was a basic intro on how to use these methods on training new employees. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask your vet!

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