Easy Does It; Slower is Faster

One thing that milking cows will teach you is that cows give milk; you don’t take it from them. As I remind school children during lessons on dairy animals, every dairy cow in Virginia, every dairy cow in the United States, all the dairy cows in the World have one thing in common…they are all moms. As we all know, if Mom isn’t happy, no one is happy!

Slow and easy treatment pays dividends with all herd animals, especially cattle. Like children, calm firmness and determined consistency are also part of the toolbox. Rough treatment during handling causes undue stress that adversely affects weight gain and meat quality. It also endangers those who handle the agitated animals.

Dr. Temple Grandin, an animal behavior specialist at Colorado State University shared some of her observations about cattle handling. “When an animal becomes upset, it can take 20-30 minutes for it to calm down. Cattle are prey species animals. They have survived by being weary.” Temple also shared some thoughts on “no-nos” of handling cattle. “Never strike or even pet cattle about their head.” Dr. Grandin stated that this preconditions them to butt people in response. People are injured by cattle mostly by equipment failures and by cattle that have been singled out.

It is also important to keep noise in check, especially yelling at animals in attempts to move them. Research at Louisiana State University measured responses of animals to different methods used to drive them by looking at how much adrenaline was released into the bloodstream following the treatment. Higher levels of adrenaline showed that animals had increased stress. Further, their research also pointed out that stressed cattle took more time to move through working facilities.

LSU researchers found that only electric prods produced higher levels of adrenaline than yelling. Surprisingly, levels associated with striking the animal with a stick or cane were significantly lower (nearly half) than levels tied to yelling, even though striking caused increase incidence of bruising and meat quality damages.

In future articles, we will investigate way to make cattle handling safer and more efficient for everyone involved…including the cattle. Until next time, please be safe on your farming operation. Take your time; be smooth and easy with your herd animals. You are an important part of our community!

Upcoming Events

Aug 16 Deadline to consign calves to September VQA Sale

Aug 20 August VQA Sale, Tri State Livestock Market 7 pm

Aug 26 VQA Steer Take Up

Aug 28 VQA Heifer Take Up

Aug 29 Hay and Forage Field Day, SWVA AREC

Sept 24 September VQA Sale

Sept 26 Smyth Washington Cattleman Meeting

Sept 30 VQA Steer Take Up

Oct 2 VQA Heifer take Up

Oct 9 Ag Field Day for 4th Graders

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at (276) 783-5175/TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.