

# Use animal sense to prevent injury



**NURSE MURF**

By HELEN MURPHY

**K**NOWING your cattle and how they think will make you safer. Treating them gently with patience will not only improve your product but also goes a long way toward preventing injuries.

Don't underestimate the power of livestock. One out of every three hospital admissions for nonfatal farm injuries is caused by accidents with animals. It is even more of a problem among youth on minority-run farms. A USDA survey found animals to be the No. 1 cause of injuries.

Our agriculture elders are also vulnerable. Livestock is the leading cause of injury in aging farmers (44.5%), whereas tractors account for only 11%. Among all age groups, youth have higher injury rates, according to the Agricultural Health Study, likely because they take more chances. Other studies show that your risk is 20 times higher if you work with animals more than 30 hours a week.

What is the key to prevention? Knowing what makes your cattle tick.

They are motivated by four things: fear, aggression, learned responses and instinct.

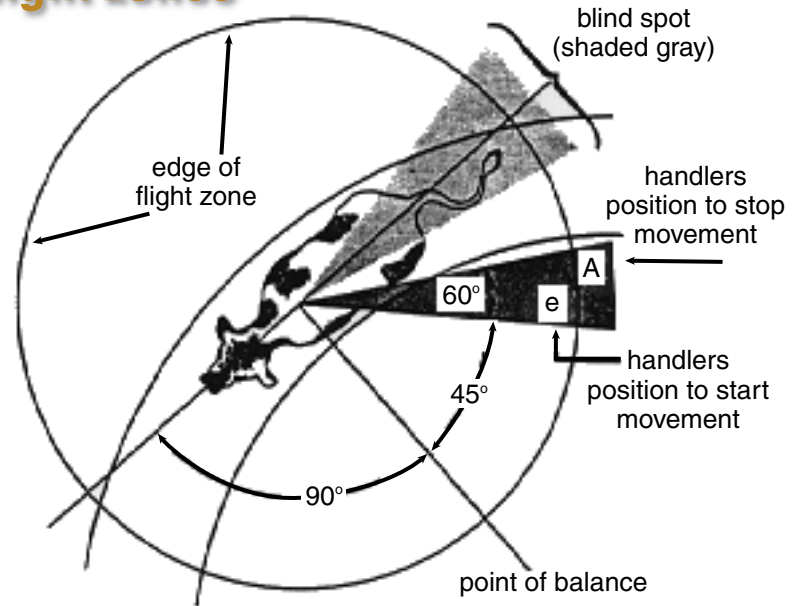
■ **Fear.** In spite of their content appearance, cattle are the most nervous of all livestock and easily startled. They consider themselves as prey and everyone else as predators. Any quick movement can be interpreted as a signal of a predatory strike. Accidents usually occur when they are afraid. A frightened animal will plow right over you.

■ **Aggression.** True aggression is rare, but it will happen if they see you as one they need to dominate. This mistaken identity is more common with males, especially those raised by humans.

■ **Learned responses.** Cattle have long memories, especially when mistreated and stressed. They are creatures of habit and will be disturbed by changes in routine or scenery. Moving a trough or working them on foot if they are accustomed to horses will result in unexpected reactions. They are easily startled by strange noises or people.

■ **Instinct.** Their herding instinct is strong. Leaving one alone or without their herd mate will be extremely

## Flight zones



**FLIGHT ZONES:** Drive cattle by recognizing their flight zones to avoid injury, as depicted in this illustration from the Auburn University College of Agriculture.

stressful. They will follow the leader but must have somewhere to go. Cow-calf pairs can be dangerous, especially with the first-born heifer.

The smart handler also needs to understand cattle senses: Their peripheral vision is almost 360 degrees, but their color and depth perception is nil. This leaves them unable to judge distances but highly sensitive to contrasts. They will fear things such as shadows, water puddles, drain grates, shiny objects, flapping objects and bright spots from light coming through a roof. When they

stop and lower their heads, it is to inspect objects. Any activity in their blind spot will make them nervous.

Cattle are very sensitive to noise. High-frequency sounds, like a high-pitched whistle, will hurt their ears. Screaming and yelling stresses them. On the other hand, music is calming.

Murphy, outreach and education director at the University of Washington Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, may be reached by phone at 206-616-5906 or by e-mail at hmurf@u.washington.edu.

## Keeping livestock free from stress

**E**XPERTS like Temple Grandin, professor of animal science at Colorado State University, advocate putting knowledge of your animal's behavior into practice to keep them stress-free:

- Work slowly; minimize noise levels.
- Move them by working their flight zone and using their point of balance to control the direction.
- Never prod without a place to go.
- Avoid the animal's kicking region when approaching, especially the injured or inflamed side (e.g., mastitis).
- Avoid electric prods; use alternative drivers such as flags.
- Design your facilities to minimize distractions.
- Keep your facilities evenly lit, and clear of debris and water.
- Raise your cattle, especially bulls, with their own kind.
- Always have an escape route and work in pairs.
- Know the signs of an aggressive animal, work cautiously with males and cows with calves.
- Use your personal protective equipment — steel-toe shoes, gloves, long trousers, shin guards, safety glasses and a hard hat.

For more information see Grandin's Web site at [www.grandin.com](http://www.grandin.com). For handler training materials, see [secure.fass.org/publications/order\\_form1.asp](http://secure.fass.org/publications/order_form1.asp).

## Calendar

### October

**15-17:** U.S. Pea & Lentil Trade Association convention, Davenport Hotel, Spokane, Wash. Contact: Kim Monk. Phone: 208-882-3023. E-mail: [kmonk@pea-lentil.com](mailto:kmonk@pea-lentil.com).

### November

**11-13:** Western National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's conference: Health & Safety in Western Agriculture, The Lodge at Suncadia, Cle Elum, Wash. Phone: 206-616-1958. E-mail: [pnash@u.washington.edu](mailto:pnash@u.washington.edu).

**14-15:** Montana State University Sheep and Goat Conference, Island Grove Park, Greeley, Colo. Contact: Rodney Kott. Phone: 406-994-3415. E-mail: [rkott@montana.edu](mailto:rkott@montana.edu).

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