

UNIT : CATTLE HANDLING

INTRODUCTION

Cattle need to be handled safely often in any beef production system. The risk to human and animal safety and welfare has increased in recent years by

- increasing cattle numbers per handler,
- a lack of investment in handling facilities,
- an increase in the number of temperamental animals unused to being handled or adoption of bull beef systems
- the need to handle animals for
 - weighing, drenching etc
 - veterinary treatment or testing,
 - to satisfy traceability by for ear tag reading and
 - meat hygiene requirements for trimming before slaughter

Improvements in handling safety and efficiency can be made by changing aspects of the handling facilities and the behaviour of the handler and animal.

THE PROBLEM

Poorly maintained handling facilities and those of inappropriate design can cause:

- reduced handling efficiency and work rate
- injuries to cattle and handlers
- reduced animal performance following stress
- poor meat quality (the meat of stressed animals is often downgraded) and carcass trimming losses due to bruising

WHAT IS REQUIRED

- Safe system for the operator that can, if necessary, be operated by one person.
- Safe, efficient, welfare-friendly handling for the animals that encourage the animals to move calmly in the without the need for the handler or the handler being in direct contact with the animals if possible.

KEY DESIGN FEATURES

Location – the handling system should often be viewed as an integral part of the housing system and should be designed and located in order to have easy access from cattle housing and the yard as well as convenient exit to load animals onto lorries or trailers

Light – the area should be well lit by artificial or natural light since dark conditions discourage animals from moving through the system smoothly and easily

Floor – the floor needs to be uniformly concreted with no gaps, holes or sharp edges and non-slip for cattle and handlers to avoid accident and injury

Walls – solid walls prevent cattle from being distracted or frightened with no projections or sharp angles that can cause injury

Gates – all gates should open fully through 180° for maximum flexibility and avoidance of injury and should close firmly by means of easy-release catches.

Roof – the crush and any potentially sensitive electronic weighing or recording equipment ideally need to be covered by a roof but, although it might be more comfortable for handlers and cattle to remain dry, all the other components of the system can be un-roofed.

Collecting pen – the cattle must be held in a pen that is large enough to hold the number and size of animals being handled at any time. Long, narrow pens are preferable when moving cattle on through the system.

Forcing pen – the system should include a circular or angled forcing pen with self-locking gate catches that directs the animals into a race

Race – a gradually curving, sheeted race of a width that prevents animals turning around and with sliding gates at intervals to prevent animals reversing should lead cattle into the crush where they will be treated

Crush – a secure crush with good visibility in the front to attract the animal and a strong yoke that can be operated from the back of the crush to avoid standing in front of the animal will ensure that the animals can be handled without risk to the handler – a clear stock-free area around the front and sides of the crush is critical for handler safety

Sorting gates – cattle need to be capable of being shed or separated without stress on leaving the crush

Loading ramp – a safe, secure, properly designed loading ramp will ensure that the animals can be loaded into a lorry or trailer without stress or injury

CONCLUSIONS

- **Minimise the opportunity to turn around** – use long, narrow pens rather than square ones
- **Present clear exits** – avoid 90 degree turns which look like dead-ends and use large gates. Avoid any obstructions near the exit of the crush.
- **Use non-slip flooring** – worn floors are responsible for fatal falls to handlers and many cattle injuries.
- **Use the animal's inquisitiveness to guide them forwards** – cattle move more quickly through curved races where the view of humans and the crush is obscured.
- **Avoid distractions** – solid sides to pens and races prevent the sight of humans and other animals and minimise disturbance.
- **Humans around the crush should be safe** – both sides of the crush should be accessible, the crush should be designed to minimise opportunities for becoming trapped and the area around it should be cattle-free.
- **Remain calm** – the use of sticks and shouting has been shown to slow cattle movement

INFORMATION SOURCES

EBLEX (2005) Beef Action for Profit 12 – Better Returns from Safe Cattle Handling

EBLEX (2009) EBLEX Beef BRP Manual 3 – Improving Cattle Handling for Better Returns

HSE (2006) Handling and Housing Cattle Agriculture Information Sheet No 35

SAC (2004) Modifying existing cattle handling systems to improve human safety Technical Note 564

SAC (2004) Recommendations for the design of new, safe and efficient cattle handling systems Technical Note 565

Activity – 'Spot the problem' – EBLEX Beef BRP Manual 3 p10