

FACT SHEET 13.11 AMPC + MLA

LOW-STRESS LIVESTOCK HANDLING TECHNIQUES

Handling skills are essential for managing livestock. Good livestock handling skills can minimise stress and injury; reduce time and effort required to move animals; reduce stress for both people and animals; make working with animals safer and more enjoyable; and improve productivity and meat quality.

Throughout 2012-13 AMPC has facilitated the development of programs in low-stress livestock handling techniques to cattle and sheep stock handlers at abattoirs. Using the principles of 'no touch and no noise', handlers have been introduced to the theory underpinning stock handling and welfare, as well as receiving practical training in operating yards.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GOOD LIVESTOCK HANDLING?

LIVESTOCK SENSES

Livestock handlers are most effective when they communicate with an animal through visual techniques, however it is important to be aware of livestock visual abilities. Livestock are prey animals. As such, their eyes are set further apart, giving them a very wide angle of vision. However, they have poor depth perception. Livestock handlers need to keep moving in order for the animal to perceive how far away they are. In addition, when animals see something they are unsure of, they may need to stop to get a better view of the item and determine how far, high, wide etc it is.

Animals can see colour. Certain colours, such as greens and blues are more likely to calm the animal and should be worn more by stock handlers, whereas reds and yellows will stimulate the animals, making them effective as goods.

ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

The way an animal is handled will affect its subsequent behaviour. The more nervous and frightened an animal is, the less responsive and more reactive (unpredictable and uncontrollable) it becomes. Understanding animal psychology and behaviour will reduce stress, which reduces the animal's ability to fight disease and weight gain. The basic principle is to prevent animals from becoming agitated by reinforcing gentle handling.

LIVESTOCK SENSES – THE FIELD OF VISION

Livestock utilise five senses: vision; auditory; taste; touch; and olfactory. Vision is by far the most important.

The field of vision describes the animal's ability to see around them. The animal's blind spot is the area behind the animal's head where they cannot see – the size depends on whether the animal's head is up or down. When the animal's head is down the blind spot is larger, when the animal's head is up the blind spot is smaller.

THE FLIGHT ZONE

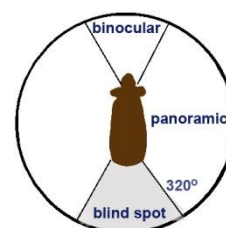
The flight zone is the animal's personal space; that is, the area around the animal that they do not want you to enter. Flight zones can be described as the space or area surrounding a lone animal or an entire herd. This area if penetrated will cause an individual or groups of animals to attempt to re-gain a comfortable distance away from the intruder. Wild or extensively reared livestock that are less used to handling will often have a larger flight zone. Quiet animals, or those accustomed to handling or regular human contact, can often have a reduced flight zone.

POINT OF BALANCE

The point of balance is at the animal's shoulder. If you watch closely, you will see that animals will position themselves just behind the shoulder (point of balance) of another animal. This is the same for the stockperson when using flight zone principles. Handlers who understand the concepts of flight zone and point of balance will be able to move animals more effectively with less stress.

'RULES OF ENGAGEMENT' WHEN WORKING WITH LIVESTOCK

- Position: where are you in relation to the eye
- Pressure: whatever is applied must be released
- Movement: increase or decrease your body movement
- Communication: to the animal and to your work mates.



Livestock Vision

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HANDLING FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Well-designed and maintained facilities will improve livestock movement because they enable the handler to be in the correct position when moving stock. Well-designed and maintained facilities also reduce baulking.

WHAT ARE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE STOCK HANDLING PRACTICES?

A great deal of research has been undertaken in Australia as to the impact of stock handler behaviour on animal fear and stress levels. As a result it is possible to divide stock handler practices into positive and negative types of behavior.

Positive behaviours, which tend to reduce stress levels are actions like:

- moving slowly and quietly amongst the animals
- using a stick and flag rather than an electric goad
- using a rattle or tin dog
- moving groups rather than individuals
- allowing time for stock, especially the lead animal, to investigate the environment.

Negative behaviours used by the stock handler will generally increase fear in the animals being handled. Research has shown that negative behaviours include:

- the use of the electric goad
- hitting animals
- banging on gates
- shouting
- excessive use of dogs
- forcing animals when there is nowhere to go.

If these negative behaviours are used frequently, animals will become afraid and stressed.



WHAT DO THE TRAINING COURSES COVER?

The two-day course is for meat processing stock handlers and supervisors who have responsibility for the handling, unloading, yarding, lairage and general movement of livestock prior to processing. It teaches stock handlers simple handling techniques to reduce the stress of yarding and lairage programs.

The program is based around the Unit AHCLSK205A *Handle livestock using basic techniques* and is appropriate to livestock handlers throughout the red meat supply chain. The Unit is an induction Unit for livestock handlers and addresses the principles of low stress handling, animal welfare and the WHS issues associated with working with livestock.

The trainer is Boyd Holden who has had wide-spread experience in the delivery of stock handling training, working extensively in Australia and overseas.

Boyd worked closely with MINTRAC during 2012 to develop the livestock handling training and assessment materials and in the livestock handling training programs for feedlots and saleyards.

WHAT HAVE PARTICIPANTS THOUGHT OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM?

Over the last twelve months over 100 people have attended the MINTRAC training courses. Here is a selection of the comments received.

- Showed me new ideas and different methods to try
- Found new ways of moving and handling livestock
- The easy way of moving cattle by not touching the animal
- It helped me better understand what the animals are going through when we are yelling and making noise
- It filled in the missing pieces that I did not have by giving me the theory and practice
- This is a good course and hopefully can be built upon and can give the people in the stockyards a career path just like the people in the slaughter floor and the boning rooms
- The pressure on/off move and the flight zone; got some good points out of the course
- Gave me a great understanding of the animal welfare issues in the industry