

# Chapter 2 - Handling Animals

## Cattle

Injuries from cattle relate to a number of factors - inadequate yard design, lack of training of handlers, unsafe work practices, and the weight, sex, stress factor and temperament of animals.

### Spot the hazard

- Check accident records to identify tasks most likely to cause injury.
- Consider situations that cause stress and injury to handlers and stock.
- Take into account sex, weight and temperament of stock.
- Consider effects of weather and herding on animal behavior, and time allowed for settling down.
- Check potential hazards and safety advantages of stock facilities, including mechanical aids and work layout.
- Consider what training is required before a person can confidently and competently handle stock.

### Assess the risk

- Using accident records, check which tasks and work situations are most frequently linked with injuries.
- Discuss safety concerns of handlers in regard to various tasks.
- Check each identified hazard for likelihood and severity of injury.
- Assess proposed safeguards and safe procedures for other hazards.

### Make the changes

Here are some suggestions for improving safety in cattle handling.

- Always plan ahead. Prepare and communicate safe work practices. Get assistance if necessary.
- Wear appropriate clothing, including protective footwear and a hat for sun protection.
- Make use of facilities and aids - headrails, branding cradles, whips, drafting canes, dogs etc.
- Know the limitations of yourself and others - work within those limitations.
- Respect cattle - they have the strength and speed to cause injury.

### Facilities and conditions

- Yards and sheds should be strong enough and of a size to match the cattle being handled.

- Good yard design assists the flow of stock. Avoid sharp, blind corners, and ensure gates are well positioned.
- Keep facilities in good repair and free from protruding rails, bolts, wire etc.
- Where cattle need restraining, use crushes, headrails, cradles, etc.
- Footholds and well-placed access ways are important.
- Try to maintain yards in non-slippery condition.
- Cattle are more unpredictable during cold, windy weather.

### **The stock**

- Hazards vary according to the age, sex, breed, weight, horn status, temperament and training of animals.
- Approach cattle quietly, and make sure they are aware of your presence.
- Bulls are more aggressive during mating season and extremely dangerous when fighting. Separate into different yards where appropriate.
- Cows and heifers are most likely to charge when they have a young calf at foot.
- Heifers can also be dangerous at weaning time.
- Isolated cattle often become stressed and are more likely to charge when approached.
- Cattle with sharp horns are dangerous - dehorning is recommended where practicable. Dehorned and polled cattle can still cause injury.

### **Cattle yarding**

- Avoid working in overstocked yards where you risk being crushed or trampled.
- While drafting cattle through a gate, work from one side to avoid being knocked down by an animal trying to go through.
- Take care when working with cattle in a crush, e.g. to vaccinate, apply tail tags, etc. A sudden movement by stock could crush your arms against rails or posts.
- When closing a gate behind cattle in a crush or small yard, stand to one side, or with one foot on the gate in case the mob forces the gate back suddenly.

### **Kicking and butting**

- To avoid kick injuries, attempt to work either outside the animal's kicking range or directly against the animal, where the effect of being kicked will be minimized.
- In dairies there is a high risk of being kicked. Try to follow a regular routine so as not to alarm cows - e.g. by placing cold water on their teats.
- When working on an animal's head, use head bail to restrain it from sudden movement forwards or back.
- Take care when using hazardous equipment, such as brands or knives for castrating or bangtailing.

## **Stud cattle**

- When working with stud cattle, train animals to accept intensive handling through gradual familiarization, e.g. grooming, washing, clipping.
- When leading cattle on a halter, never wrap the lead rope round your arm or hand. If the animal gets out of control, you could be dragged.
- Bulls should be fitted with a nose ring. When being led, their heads should be held up by the nose lead.

## **Hygiene**

- Be aware of the risks of contracting such diseases as Leptospirosis or Q Fever when working with animals. These diseases are transmitted through contact with blood, saliva and urine.
- Hygiene is important. Consider vaccinating herds against such diseases.

**First Aid Emergencies:** If a person is bitten, scratched or seriously injured by any farm animal, follow proper first aid and medical procedures. First aid procedures are listed in the appendix at the end of this safety manual.

# Swine

Pig handlers face injuries from the size, strength and temperament of the animals they tend. Injuries may also relate to training of handlers, the safe design of pens, lanes and other yarding, and the administering of drugs and chemicals. Noise in pig sheds can reach levels that require hearing protection.

## **Spot the hazard**

Check the safety of pens, floors and lanes, handling and restraining of animals, safety training for new and young workers, safe lifting methods, safe use of chemicals, and protection from diseases carried by pigs. Study worker injury records for evidence of hazardous jobs and situations.

## **Assess the risk**

Assess whether any of the hazards identified are likely to cause injury or harm, and base safety decisions on the likelihood and possible severity of the injury or harm.

## **Make the changes**

The following suggestions are to help minimize or eliminate the risk of injury or harm in pig handling:

- Check pens and lanes are large and strong enough for the pigs being handled.
- Ensure pen design assists the smooth flow of pigs - avoid sharp, blind corners, and ensure gates are well positioned.
- Keep facilities in good repair and free from protruding rails, bolts, wire and rubbish.
- Where pigs need restraining, use crushes and nose ropes.
- Try to maintain non-slippery conditions, especially in lanes and loading yards.

## **Stock factors**

- Safety in pig handling varies according to a number of factors - age, sex, breed, weight, temperament and training of the animal.
- Boars can be aggressive and unpredictable. Treat them with caution.
- Boars are most aggressive during mating, and extremely dangerous when fighting.
- Prevent boars from coming in contact with each other at all times.
- When moving boars, use a drafting board.

## **Lifting pigs**

- When lifting pigs, get assistance where possible.
- When lifting alone, sit the pig on its hindquarters, squat down, take a firm hold of the back legs, pull the animal firmly against your body and lift, using your legs and not your back.
- Remember, when lifting a pig this way make sure the pig's head is positioned so that it cannot bring its head back into your face.

## **Chemicals, vaccinations and injections**

- Read labels on chemicals and antibiotic containers carefully - follow manufacturers' instructions and safety directions.
- Sterilize needles, teeth cutters and ear pliers, and ensure operators observe hygienic practices.
- Observe recommended withholding periods for drugs and chemicals before pigs are slaughtered.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing.
- If headaches or any other discomfort is suffered after handling chemicals, seek medical advice and have appropriate tests.
- Avoid these chemicals if possible in future, and use full protective clothing and breathing filters when handling chemicals in the feed mill.
- Ensure correct dosage rates are maintained.

## **Transmittable diseases**

- Animals carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans. Be familiar with the symptoms so you can tell if these diseases exist in the herd.
- If signs of disease appear, have the disease confirmed and animals tested. If the disease is present, treat affected animals appropriately and vaccinate to prevent further occurrence. Maintain a vaccination program.
- Diseases like Leptospirosis are transferred by urine, blood and saliva, and through open wounds. Keep open wounds covered and wash well with water, soap and antiseptic if contact is made with blood, urine or saliva from diseased animals (See Topic on Zoonoses for further information).
- Maintain personal hygiene at all times.

**First Aid Emergencies:** If a person is bitten, scratched or seriously injured by any farm animal, follow proper first aid and medical procedures. First aid procedures are listed in the appendix at the end of this safety manual.

# Sheep

Manual handling injuries - wear and tear to the back, shoulders, neck, torso, arms and legs - are the main problems to avoid when handling sheep. Awkward postures, working off balance, and strenuous, repetitive and sudden stress movements can cause immediate or gradual strain injuries and conditions.

## Spot the hazard

- Take note of sheep handling activities that put strain on any part of the body.
- Unfit, untrained or out of condition workers are most likely to be injured.
- Check sheep yarding, handling and shearing facilities for injury hazards.
- Check injury records for tasks and situations causing most injuries.
- Discuss hazard concerns with other sheep handlers.

## Assess the risk

Assess each identified hazard for the likelihood of injury or harm. Assess also the likely severity of injuries or harm. The more likely and serious the potential injury, the more urgent it is to minimize the risks.

## Make the changes

The following suggestions are to help farmers and sheep handlers make sheep handling safer:

- Use a yard design that will encourage sheep to work freely.
- Build yards on sloping ground for better drainage.
- Keep shadows to a minimum where not required to provide shade. Build protective coverings over working and drafting races where practical.
- Avoid slippery surfaces, especially in races and forcing yards.
- Keep dust levels at a minimum.

## Fitness and health

People working with sheep should:

- Exercise regularly, and eat a well balanced diet to keep fit and maintain required energy levels.
- Read labels on chemical containers carefully, and follow manufacturers' instructions and safety directions.
- Observe recommended withholding periods for drugs or chemicals before stock are slaughtered.

### **Working with lambs**

- When marking and mulesing lambs, use a cradle where feasible. Keeping a firm grip on lambs helps to avoid cuts and chemical spillage.
- Catchers should wear protective gloves.
- Use a work system on cradles that minimizes hazards of being cut, sprayed with chemicals or jabbed with a needle.
- Sterilize knives, shears and ear pliers, and ensure operators observe hygiene practices.

### **Jetting, dipping, drenching**

- Choose chemicals that are most efficient and least harmful to humans. Always wear protective clothing, goggles and breathing equipment where specified.
- Use positive air supply hoods. If headaches or other discomforts occur after handling chemicals, seek medical advice and have appropriate health tests. Avoid using those chemicals in future.
- Ensure correct mixing rates are used.
- Keep equipment well maintained, and check regularly to avoid chemical leakage.

### **Mustering**

- Plan the muster. Sheep movement is affected by wind direction, location of water, etc.
- Allow plenty of time. Do not rush stock.
- Use dogs to control the mob. High speed chases on bikes or horses can cause accidents.

### **Lifting sheep**

- If sheep need to be lifted, get assistance where possible.
- When lifting alone, sit the sheep on its rump, squat yourself down, take a firm hold of its back legs while keeping the sheep's head up to restrict movement. Pull the animal firmly against your body, and lift using your legs, not your back.
- If lifting over a fence, do not attempt to drag the sheep over. Rather, work from the same side as the sheep.
- To save lifting, put a drafting gate at the end of the handling race. It is advisable to have several positions for "drop gates" in the race to hold sheep that are to be drafted off.

### **Rams**

- Rams can be aggressive and unpredictable. Treat them with caution.

- When working rams in a race, ensure you are protected from those behind you. This applies particularly when checking testicles, etc. A well-positioned drop gate is useful to reduce the hazard.

### **Transmittable diseases**

- Animals carry diseases that are transferable to humans. Be familiar with the symptoms so you can determine if disease exists in the flock.
- If signs of disease appear, have the disease confirmed and animals tested.
- If the disease is present, treat affected animals appropriately and vaccinate to prevent further occurrence.
- Diseases are transmitted by urine, blood and saliva, and through open wounds (e.g. scabby mouth).
- Keep open wounds covered. Wash well with water, soap and antiseptic if contact is made with urine, blood or saliva from diseased animals.
- Personal hygiene is important at all times.

**First Aid Emergencies:** If a person is bitten, scratched or seriously injured by any farm animal, follow proper first aid and medical procedures. First aid procedures are listed in the appendix at the end of this safety manual.