



PHOTO: BECKY MILLS

Handle With Care

When it comes to working with livestock, a little prevention goes a long way. **BY CLAIRE VATH**

Maintaining good, secure facilities is key to safety, says Doug Hicks, who works cattle in Tifton, Ga.

Every farmer, rancher or vet has a personal story about a run-in with livestock. Sometimes it seems that busted lips, broken toes, bruised ribs and sprains come with the territory.

But according to statistics collected in 2009 (most recent data available) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, livestock-related injuries can be way more serious than a few bumps and bruises.

The report looked at fatalities from livestock in four states from 2003 to 2008. It found in 67% of the cases, deaths occurred with someone 60 years of age or older, and 95% of those fatalities involved male farm workers. All but one case was caused by blunt trauma to the head or chest, and all were associated with either working cattle in enclosed areas, moving or herding the animals, loading and feeding.

Of those deaths, one-third were caused by animals who previously exhibited aggressiveness.

A recent study from the National Safety Council ranked beef cattle farms second and dairy operations third among all farming enterprises in injuries per hours of work, 17% of which involved animals.

That's just the injuries that have been reported, which is why safety is crucial, stresses Tim Marshall, dean of agriculture and natural resources at Abraham Baldwin College in Tifton, Ga., and animal science professor. He is well aware of the dangers of livestock handling.

"At one cattle sale my students worked many years ago, there were poorly constructed, temporary facilities

for the animals, and the cattle were stressed because they were being handled in unfamiliar conditions prior to the sale," he explains. "When nervous cattle are being worked through unfamiliar, poorly designed facilities, someone's going to get hurt."

Since the conditions were less than ideal, Marshall decided to work the gate instead of putting students in harm's way. When an already-nervous heifer was being separated to enter the sale ring, she ran through the sorting gate, pushing it into Marshall's face. He took a trip to the emergency room for stitches over his eye.

The damage could have been far worse. But Marshall, along with Doug Hicks, animal science lab tech at Abraham Baldwin College, says taking a few simple steps can keep you safe when handling cattle, pigs or sheep:

- ▶ Think like the animal you're working. "People tend to think like people," Marshall says. "You have to think about the stresses the animals are exposed to."

For instance, hogs, he says, are extremely intelligent and remember people.

Cattle have panoramic vision and poor depth perception so shadows and unfamiliar objects can spook them.

- ▶ Keep the end product in mind. "Good cattle handling adds profit to your bottom line," Hicks says. Cattle that are anxious or stressed lose weight and have higher levels of cortisol, which will affect meat quality and profit down the line.

- Maintain good facilities. Sturdy pens are key, Hicks says. "To be able to handle cattle, you need a secure place with a squeeze chute for medical needs and calf processing."
 - Cull carefully. "I won't put up with a bad cow," says Hicks, who works with groups of students who may or may not have had prior handling experience. "If the animal shows any kind of aggressiveness in the pen, I cull them."
 - Remember that livestock aren't pets. "You're handling something that's going to go on someone's plate," Marshall says.
 - Keep facilities clean. Zoonotic diseases like ringworm, trich and rabies can be transmitted in unsanitary conditions.
 - Know the flight zone. A cow's flight zone is different from that of a sheep or pig. When it's stressed, an animal's flight zone gets bigger. Yelling, loud noises and sudden movements add to the anxiety.
- "Most handlers have been trained using a given type of cattle in a given design of facilities," Marshall says. "Handlers must be able to adapt to the cattle and the facilities. This includes reading the cattle's behavior and flight zone distance. Although very wild

- cattle are difficult to manage, very gentle cattle can be even more challenging and risky."
- Wear proper footwear around livestock. A pair of work boots with a reinforced toe provides safety where the wrong pair of shoes won't.
 - Wear gloves when working with sick and injured animals.
 - If possible, more than one person should be present when handling cattle in the field or pen.
 - Use facilities that allow checking from passageways to minimize entering the pen. And know where escape points are so you can exit quickly in an emergency. "People are hurt most often when trying to confine cattle," Marshall says. "The animals are in an abnormal environment, and they're close enough to hurt us."
 - Watch for signs of aggressiveness. These may include raised ears, tails or hair on the back, pawing the ground, teeth bared, etc. New mothers are more protective and may exhibit signs of aggressiveness when they feel their babies are being threatened.
- "In most cases, when an animal is excitable, they'll go somewhere," Marshall says, "and it's probably not going to be where you want them to go." ●

FARM TOURS

"We take you beyond the typical attractions to provide a complete cultural experience. Historic city sites, scenic country villages and modern working farms. An unforgettable opportunity to converse with people like yourself from countries around the world."



AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND



The mystery of the Outback, wild kangaroos and koalas, the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef, Ayers Rock, and the longest skyrail in the world. Overlook the Rain Forest north of Cairns. Travel through the Blue Mountains, visit farms and tour beautiful New Zealand.

January 9 - 25, 2012

SOUTH AFRICA



Travel from Johannesburg to Cape Town. Visit a large diamond mine, Pretoria, Plettenbergbay, Cape of Good Hope, the Cango Caves, farms, and a native village. Enjoy views of the Table Rock Mountains, and see ostriches, penguins, and Africa's incredible wildlife.

November 6 - 21, 2011

ARGENTINA CHILE - PERU



THREE GREAT COUNTRIES! Lima and the incredible Machu Picchu in Peru. The scenic beauty of Santiago, Valparaiso, and Santa Cruz in Chile, and Buenos Aires in Argentina. Visit a gaucho cattle ranch, vineyards, farms, and enjoy an elegant and sensuous Tango Show.

January 5 - 20, 2012

ALASKA



Tour Seattle's Boeing aircraft plant, cruise the Inside Passage stopping in Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, Hubbard Glacier and more. Travel by land to Anchorage, Fairbanks, Denali Park and Palmer for a look at Alaska's ag production. Enjoy uninterrupted panoramic views of the Alaskan Wilderness on a Dome Rail Train ride

4 Summer Departures - 2012

BRAZIL



13 Yrs of Brazil Ag Tours means You See the Best! Conducted by an ag-specialist and agronomist. Tour Brazil's largest state, Mato Grosso, visit their largest ethanol plant, and the world's biggest soybean farm. Enjoy the Amazon Jungle & River Cruise, Brasilia, and the incredible Iguassu Falls.

Jan. 24 - Feb. 6 • Feb. 7 - 20, 2012

CHINA



Visit China's largest soybean, corn and wheat, farming region. Explore equipment factories, the Great Wall near Beijing, and the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an. You will not believe Shanghai's modern, high rise skyline.

November. 6 - 18, 2011

888-414-4177
www.rupipertravel.com

Find More Tours on our Website!
BBB MEMBER