



The majority of the time, human error is to blame for accidents with livestock – a lapse in judgment, inexperience or unpreparedness. Handlers can get in a hurry or attempt jobs that may require more than one person. Below are some ways to help prevent those incidents.

Animal Behavior

Livestock are creatures of habit and prefer a routine (i.e., making feeding and milking times the same each day). Livestock also prefer being around other livestock. They can become frightened or agitated when separated from the rest of the group. When in large groups, livestock will often follow the leader, which can be beneficial when moving them from place to place.

Be Patient

Probably one of the most important, and sometimes challenging, virtues when it comes to handling livestock is patience. When an animal refuses to cooperate, yelling and poking and prodding at the animal will only make the animal more nervous or agitated.

Use slow but deliberate movements around livestock; don't be afraid, but don't underestimate an animal; and avoid loud noises. Animals draw upon past experiences and treatment when reacting to a situation or a person.

Facilities

Many injuries related to livestock around the farm can be resolved by considering facilities. For better traction, use concrete flooring with a rough finish and use grooved walkways in high-traffic areas. Also, make sure there is proper drainage to prevent slipping. Install strong, durable fencing and gates that are recommended for the type of livestock you have.

Lighting should be even because shadows can scare animals. Make sure sharp or protruding objects are removed from areas where livestock or humans move. Alleys and chutes should be large enough for the animal to pass through but not turn around, to keep them moving.

Exit Strategy

When dealing with livestock in tight quarters it is important to have a plan of escape. Consider constructing pens and gates with easy exits, or gaps in fencing that are just big enough for a person and not the animal to pass through. When entering a pasture or large enclosure, make sure there is a fast and easy method of escape. Always have “an out.”

Flight Zone

Understanding an animal’s flight zone is important – the flight zone is an animal’s personal space. An animal will react depending on a person’s proximity to its flight zone and the person’s actions within its flight zone. An animal’s point of balance is at its shoulders. Positioning yourself in front of an animal (in front of its point of balance) will make the animal step back, while slowly moving behind the animal will encourage it to move forward. Animals cannot see behind them, so they will want to keep you in their line of sight or move away from you.

Train Employees

It is important to make sure anyone you hire to work with your livestock has been trained to properly handle the animals. Work beside them or keep yourself nearby until they are comfortable working with the animals. Emphasizing proper handling and safety guidelines and making sure everyone involved in the operation understands them is important in preventing a livestock-related incident.

