

Best Practices of Handling IN THE CORRAL



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The daily work in beef cattle farms involves many activities and most of them have to be done at the handling corrals, where it is possible to have more control over the animals. The situations involving cattle handling procedures at the corral are usually considered stressful and risky, and that nothing could be done to prevent these problems; but this is a false assumption. Even when stressful procedures cannot be avoided, there is a lot to be done to minimize the stress. For example, by using the best practices of handling, we can reduce stress and pain caused by castration, vaccination and other disturbing procedures, fostering animals' welfare. To have success on this, it is necessary to change attitude, which implies in respecting the cattle, recognizing them as sentient beings, which are able to feel pain, fear and also satisfaction, and then, to adopt handling strategies that take into account the welfare of the animals and their natural behaviors. This manual aims to offer a series of practical recommendations as how to perform handling procedures in beef cattle in the corral with minimum stress, lower risk of accidents and greater labour efficiency.



Best practices of handling in the corral – step-by-step

1. Plan all handling procedures to be performed in the corral, defining the number of animals to be worked on and the cowboy team responsible for the work.
2. Verify if the facilities, equipment and materials necessary to perform the work are available, clean, and in good working order.
3. Define the responsibilities of each cowboy, who should be informed about the work that will be done. They also have to be well prepared to perform the handling procedures in the corral.
4. Guide the animals to the corral slowly and carefully; do not run or shout.
5. Driving should be done with one of the cowboys positioned in front of the herd (lead horse), serving as a guide, while the other should follow, to prevent the animals from returning, but without putting pressure on them.
6. When the pasture is too far, drive the animals the day before, let them spend the night in a pasture or paddock near the corral, ensuring good forage and free access to water.
7. Never urge the animals, especially at transitions between facilities, such as at the entrance of corridors or at gateways.
8. Use a lead cattle (sinuelo) to facilitate livestock driving, when possible and necessary.
9. It is recommended to accommodate cattle on paddocks near the corral, taking smaller groups at a time. When this is not possible, accommodate the animals in the gathering pen.
10. Only drive to corral the number of animals that will be handled in a working day period. Do not overfill the gathering and sorting pens, leave at least half of free space, so the animals can move around and handling can be done easily.
11. After the cattle are accommodated in the corral, pay attention to the ranch horses. Loosen the cinch, remove the bridle and give them access to shade and water.
12. Do not shout, make sudden movements and do not harm animals. Work calmly, pay close attention and do not put excessive pressure on cattle.
13. Use the handling flag correctly, as it works as an extension of your arm and serves to facilitate cattle driving. Do not use the flag to scare or harm cattle.
14. Cattle can also be driven only by using the hands (body posture to move the animals).
15. In either case, with the flag or with nothing in your hand, the concepts of distance and flight zone, point of balance and blind spot of cattle must be applied.
16. Avoid using the electric prod, do so only in emergency situations, such as when animals need to be encouraged to stand or move an animal. Never use the electric prod on calves.
17. Animals of different categories (e.g. cows and calves) should be sorted before being brought to the most intensive handling areas. In such cases, sorting must be done right at the entrance of the animals in the corral, using the transition gates or sorting pens.
18. When the animals have some resistance to pass the forced pen, chute and squeeze chute, open all the gates and let them pass freely, then resume work.
19. It is advisable to drive one animal at a time to the chute, thereby reducing the risk of accidents and two or more animals entering the squeeze chute at the same time.
20. Perform restraint with great care and attention. Open the back door to get the animal in, then close it at its entrance. At this moment, the exit gate must be closed, opening it only when it is necessary to stimulate the animal to enter.
21. The restraint structures (head bail and squeeze walls) shall only be operated after closing the two gates of the squeeze chute. At first, restrain the animal by the neck, then, when necessary, make use of the other restraint structures.
22. At the end of handling, release the animal by first opening the restraint structures from the body and then, from the neck. Only open the exit gate when the animal is free within the squeeze chute.
23. Ideally, when leaving the squeeze chute or sorting alley, the animal should have direct access to paddocks or entrance pens, where it should be positively reinforced by offering a palatable food supplement.

