

Animal Welfare and Behavior

Stan Curtis*
and Tom Bidner, Coordinator

The role of management in animal handling as it influences quality of the final product was presented and discussed. Portions of two videotapes on proper handling and transporting of livestock were shown. Proper handling aids, such as the paddle and a lightweight sorting panel, were demonstrated. Both videotapes and the demonstration stimulated a lively reciprocatation session.

Basic Principles

The livestock manager must understand livestock behavior and use this knowledge in all aspects of raising and transporting livestock. This basic knowledge should also be applied to the design of all livestock facilities, means of livestock transportation, livestock procurement stations and livestock slaughter facilities. Livestock handling or driving aids that are humane should be obtained and used. The cane and similar instruments should not be used, but a whip could be used to make noise. In working with livestock, the handler should remain calm, be unemotional, dispassionate and judicious.

Another important point of proper handling of livestock is ownership. It is relatively easy to convince livestock owners that their animals should be handled in a humane manner. The biggest challenge is the treatment of animals by individuals who are non-owners - for example, truckers and meat plant employees.

Swine and Cattle Videotapes

Two videotapes on livestock handling and transportation produced by the Livestock Conservation Institute were presented. Temple Grandin, Colorado State Univ., served as a consultant for the videotape project. Stan Curtis indicated he was proud to claim Temple as a former graduate student and that the videotapes were very well done.

*S. Curtis, Pennsylvania State University.

T. Bidner, Louisiana State University.

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Behavior Principles

The behavior principles are much the same for all the domesticated mammalian species. Both cattle and swine have wide-angle vision (in excess of 300°), but pigs tend to look at the ground or a few feet above the ground. Livestock will move toward light. But if grown in dimly lighted buildings, they will be afraid of bright sunlight. Livestock are followers, so it is helpful to move the leaders instead of pushing the group from the rear. The flight zone and point of balance of the animal are also important principles to understand for smooth movement. The videotapes presented examples of properly-designed facilities for livestock movement. Since it is difficult for animals to dissipate heat, rapid unloading of livestock from trucks in hot weather is imperative, especially pigs. Likewise in cold wet weather, the animals must be protected from cold stress. While this is important on the farm, it is also very important during transit because of the wind-chill factor. Pigs should be fasted with access to water for 8 to 12 hours prior to transit, since research has shown that full-gutted pigs have higher death loss. After the pigs arrive at the meat plant, they should have a short rest of two to four hours prior to slaughter. This resting period may reduce the incidence of PSE meat. Prior to transporting or moving livestock, it is beneficial for a human to enter the pen with the livestock for even as little as five minutes once a week for five weeks; animals with such experience are easier to handle.

Handling Aids

As previously indicated, use of traditional and new livestock handling and driving equipment was demonstrated. It was emphasized that the livestock cane should not be used to move livestock. The only exception might be when the cane is used in combination with a livestock panel for moving a mature male. A livestock whip could be used specifically to make noise; animals are sensitive to noise. The electric prod (hot-shot) should be used judiciously on market animals; it should not be used on breeding stock. Two new handling aids were shown. A hollow plastic paddle with plastic pellets inside and a 42" or 48" handle was demonstrated. It could be used to make noise or as a blinder to move cattle. The paddle is distributed by the Koehn Marketing Company. A shorter handle would be needed for driving pigs. A lightweight sorting panel was also shown. The panel was constructed of a plastic pipe frame in a rectangular shape covered with tough canvas cloth. The "Sort-a-Magic" is marketed by the Sort-a-Magic Company and should work very well for handling pigs.

Questions

What is the Livestock Conservation Institute?

The Livestock Conservation Institute is a nonprofit organization, established over 50 years ago, to reduce losses in the industry due to bruises and mortality during transport. This organization developed both the heat- and cold-stress indexes. Its headquarters moves to the home city of the executive director. Mr. Glen Slack is the current Executive Director, and the address is 1910 Lyda Drive, Bowling Green, KY 42104-5809.

Are animals stressed when dogs are used?

Yes, especially the first time they are used. The animals will have elevated heart rates and the normal hormonal fight-flight responses. However, animals adapt quickly to the stress as they become accustomed to the dog.

How do the wide-open receiving/loading facilities of Europe compare to those seen in the videotapes?

For receiving livestock, ramps and alleys should be as wide as possible to facilitate fast exit from the trucks. However, loading alleys and ramps should be designed for single-file entry onto trucks. If animals are given too much room, they start to circle, and it is difficult to control the leaders.

If livestock truckers are a weak link in humane treatment, how can this be improved?

One method that has been partly successful has been to work with the insurance companies that insure the loads of livestock. They have included penalties for excessive death loss and restrictions on the length and number of stops.