

BIG, STRONG, UNPREDICTABLE

Working with livestock demands multi-pronged strategy



Farm children are often assigned to work with livestock at an early age, and might also show large animals at the county fair. But did you know the injury rate for youth working on livestock farms is nearly 60 percent higher than youth working on crop farms?

Injuries from being kicked, crushed, bitten or head butted can range from deep bruises to broken bones to life-changing disability -- even death.

In addition to direct contact with livestock, injuries can occur while operating machinery, driving all-terrain vehicles or other activities related to the care and feeding of livestock.

Control what we can

Animals are unpredictable, but two factors can be modified: human behavior and the work environment.

The Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines (AYWG) can help par-

ents assess their child's readiness. In order to handle and feed large animals, children should be able to lift 10-15 percent of their own weight, react quickly, recognize hazards, problem solve and have good peripheral vision. They must also be trained in animal behavior.

When assigning livestock work to youth, it is the responsibility of parents and other adults to make certain that:

- Ventilation system is working before the child enters closed building
- All guards and shields are in place on feed conveyor system
- Work area is free from as many hazards as possible
- Lighting is even (animals can be spooked by shadows)
- Child knows an escape route
- Animals are free of disease
- Child is provided with protective equipment such as steel-toed safety shoes, gloves and a dust mask/respirator if working in

dusty conditions

- Child changes outer clothing and washes hands after job

For youth employed on farms, the US Department of Labor's Hazardous Occupations Order in Agriculture regulations apply. Youth under age 16 are prohibited from being employed to work in a yard, pen, or stall with a cow and newborn calf, bulls, boars, stallions kept for breeding purposes, or with sows with nursing pigs.

Understanding livestock

Due to limited vertical vision and lack of ability to focus quickly, cattle view a shadow on the ground as a bottomless pit.¹ Like cattle, hogs are sensitive to sharp contrasts in light and dark and may balk if they encounter shadows. Animals will tend to turn to keep the handler or perceived danger in sight. They can be startled easily by loud noises.

Most animals are territorial and will develop a comfortable sense of "homeland" in their pens, corrals and pastures.² Forcible removal tends to disturb them.

By understanding the animal, providing safe facilities, using proper personal protective equipment, and working with the animal's natural instincts, injury and fatality incidents involving livestock can be reduced.

References

1) Cattle handling and Working Facilities (Bulletin 906). Ohio State Extension, 2002. <http://beef.osu.edu/library/CattleFacilities.pdf>

2) Animal Handling Tips (E-14). Penn State Extension, 2007. <http://extension.psu.edu/business/ag-safety/animal-safety>

