

The Basics of Safe Livestock Handling

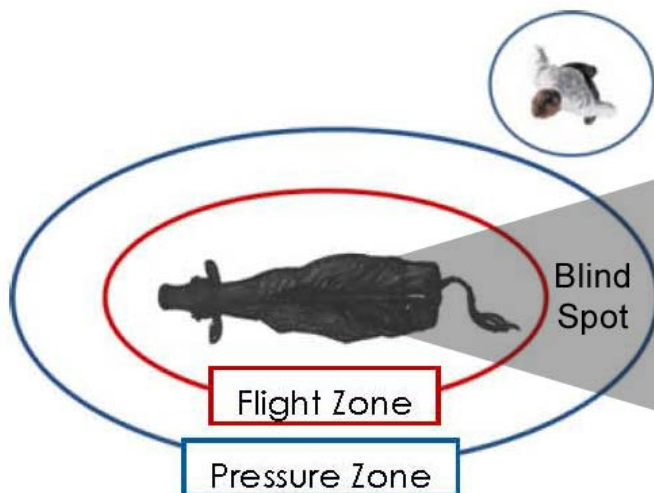
Good stockmanship involves developing a feel for the stock, perfecting your timing, and learning how to “read” the animals.

Only the cattle can teach you how to handle them right. The one key secret is calmness: Calmness before you ask them to work, calmness during and after. There really is very little else involved in winning with cattle.

Steve Cote, Stockmanship: A Powerful Tool for Grazing Lands Management



Photo credit: Paul Daigle



Moving a single cow

- Start cow movement by slowly approaching the cow's pressure zone
- Give a cow time and space to react to you
- Walk at a speed that keeps you out of the cow's flight zone
- The angle at which you approach a cow will influence the direction she moves.

Definitions:

Point of balance: The point of balance is usually at the animal's shoulder and it is determined by the animal's wide angle vision. All species of livestock will move forward if the handler stands behind the point of balance. They will back up if the handler stands in front of the point of balance.

Flight zone: the area surrounding an animal that if encroached upon by a potential predator or threat, including humans, will cause the animal to turn away. The flight zones of animals differ in size depending on how accustomed they are to human interaction.

Pressure zone: the area just beyond the outside boundary of the flight zone, where the animals will turn and face the handler, and maintain a safe distance.

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Herding tips

As prey animals, cattle herd behavior reflects their response to predators, including humans. We can use these behaviors to manage them. Cattle are motivated to maintain visual contact with each other and will readily follow a leader (including you!). They can be trained to either be led or pushed to a new pasture.

HAVE PATIENCE! THE COW IS ALWAYS RIGHT.

- Cows move consistently and predictably. They do not like change.
- If a cow is not moving the way you'd like her to, reassess the signals you are giving her or look for distractions in her line of sight.
- Be quiet; cows are very susceptible to loud noise
- Keep arms by your side, no wild gesturing and fast movements
- Never run after a cow – you will get the whole herd riled up; stay calm, even if first attempt is unsuccessful
- If animals are new to a routine/environment, let them “discover” it first time at their own pace (i.e. introducing a heifer to the milking parlor)
- When moving a herd, take your time and move at the speed of slowest animal.

For more information:

- Cote, Steve. 2004. Stockmanship: a Powerful Tool for Grazing Lands Management. Natural Resources Conservation Service. Entire book is available online at: <http://www.grandin.com/behaviour/principles/SteveCote.book.html>
- Grandin, T. and Deesing, M. 2008. Humane Livestock Handling. Storey Publishing. North Adams, Massachusetts.
- More information on Temple Grandin's methods is available at: <http://grandin.com/behaviour/principles/principles.html>
- Smith, Burt. 1998. Moving 'Em: A Guide to Low Stress Animal Handling. Available on Amazon.
- Williams, Bud. Stockmanship: www.stockmanship.com

Adapted from the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH) at the University of Minnesota (www.umash.umn.edu) publication “WHEN MOVING COWS, BE PALS!”

