

Low-stress cattle handling: the basics

BY JORDAN BARNES

This year's Ag Expo will include a special event, Profitable Environmental Options for Livestock Producers. MSU Extension educator Ben Bartlett and animal science professor Janice Swanson will discuss the benefits of a low-stress cattle handling method when dealing with beef and dairy cattle at the MSU Beef Cattle Research and Teaching Center.

"The secret to low-stress cattle handling is understanding why cattle act the way they do and then using that knowledge to 'ask' and not force them to do what you want," Bartlett said. "We also want our facilities to help us do our work better and not be a barrier."

They'll discuss the ingredients that



MSU experts will teach even the experienced cattle handler herding tips that reduce stress for handler and animal alike.

control an animal's actions: anatomy, instinct and experience. This discussion will give visitors an inside look into the world of cattle-how they view the world, how they experience stress and what they are biologically inclined to react to. Cattle are able to see 300 degrees around themselves and have keen hearing, so they perceive

the world much differently than humans. For example, yelling at cattle can increase their stress level and makes them less likely to cooperate.

"Any loud noise-especially angry people's voices-is very disturbing to cattle," Bartlett said. "In fact, research has demonstrated that people yelling can be more stressful than even the use of a hot shot."

They'll also discuss the importance of proper facilities, proper care for the cattle and the proper way to handle cattle while keeping their stress levels low. Altering cattle handling so that it's low-stress actually relieves some time issues and makes things move more smoothly.

"It takes practice. The only way to be good at low-stress handling is to practice," Bartlett said. "By taking your time, you can walk animals just about anywhere you want them to go, not because you are faster or stronger, but because you know where to be and what actions to take."

This article is from the May 2009 issue of The Scoop.

Crop insurance - a risk management tool

Learn about crop insurance at Ag Expo on Tuesday and Wednesday at 9:30 at the Exhibitor Showcase tent. Presented by Todd Gibbs of Farm Bureau Insurance.

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