

DAIRY ANIMAL HANDLING

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP)

TEMPLATE AND GUIDELINES



GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Cattle handled with gentleness and patience are more likely to perceive their surroundings and caregivers with trust, which makes subsequent human-animal interactions more likely to be efficient, safe and humane.

SOP TEMPLATE

Following the Dairy Care 365 animal handling guidelines (pages 5-7), use this template and work with your veterinarian to develop an animal handling SOP for your dairy or calf ranch. Communicate the SOP details to all employees and have available for easy reference. Review and update the SOP at least annually.

Dairy name: _____

Address: _____

Owner / Manager: _____ Phone: () _____ - _____

Veterinarian: _____ Phone: () _____ - _____

GENERAL STOCKMANSHIP (See Guidelines section 1.)

- Protocol for low-pressure handling

MOVING COWS TO AND FROM THE PARLOR (See Guidelines section 2.)

- Protocol for moving cows to the parlor
- Protocol for moving cows from the parlor back to the pen

MOVING COWS FROM THE HOLDING PEN (See Guidelines section 3.)

- Protocol for motivating cows to enter the parlor from the holding pen

SORTING COWS OR HEIFERS FROM A PEN (See Guidelines section 4.)

- Protocol for sorting cows from a pen
- Protocol for sorting heifers from a pen

LOADING COWS OR HEIFERS ONTO A TRAILER (See Guidelines section 5.)

- Protocol for loading cows onto a trailer
- Protocol for loading heifers onto a trailer

MOVING A NEWBORN CALF FROM THE CALVING AREA (See Guidelines section 6.)

- Protocol for removing a newborn calf from the calving area

WORKING WITH A BULL (See Guidelines section 7.)

- Protocol for working with a bull

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Owner / Manager signature: _____ Date: _____

Veterinarian signature: _____ Date: _____

Date SOP created: _____ Date SOP last revised: _____

1 GENERAL STOCKMANSHIP

- Throughout all movement, exercise patience and low-pressure handling principles to allow the animal to decide on its own to move rather than forcing movement.
- Stay in its pressure zone (outside line) but out of its flight zone (inside line), to reduce stress on the animal while still controlling its movement.
- When entering the pressure zone, consider the following:

a. Position

- Avoid the animal's blind spot (directly behind the animal).
 - Approaching from the blind spot will likely cause the animal to turn toward you, which is the opposite of what you want the animal to do.
 - Approaching from the blind spot may startle the animal when the animal finally realizes that you are approaching.

b. Angle

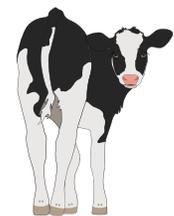
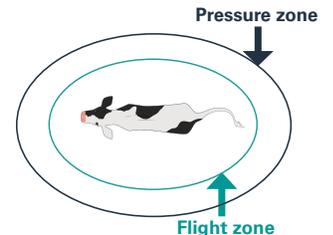
- Approach cattle where they can see you. If you cannot see her eye, she cannot see you.
- Anticipate that the cow will move away from your angle of pressure.
 - If you want the cow to move forward, walk toward the animal in a line that would connect her hip on your side with her shoulder on the opposite side.
 - If you want the cow to turn around, approach from the front and walk past her shoulder.

c. Timing

- The most common mistake is to apply too much pressure. Only apply pressure when necessary.

d. Speed

- Don't move too fast.
 - People walk 3-4 mph.
 - Cows walk about 2 mph.
 - The job almost always gets done faster by moving slower.
- When applying pressure, simply rocking back and forth will apply adequate pressure rather than advancing toward the animal, which may apply too much pressure needlessly.
- When following a group of animals in an alley, walk in a zig-zag pattern.
- Walking in the same direction of the animals causes them to slow down. Walking in the opposite direction of the animals causes them to speed up.
- Cattle are more sensitive to sound than people. There is no reason to raise your voice, whistle, etc.



2 MOVING COWS TO AND FROM THE PARLOR

- Follow the principles outlined in Section 1 when moving cows to and from the parlor. Be patient and remain calm.
- If cows are excited prior to entering the parlor, they will give less milk, defecate more and potentially kick more.
 - a. When cows become excited, they release stress hormones.
 - b. It takes 20-30 minutes for the effect of excitement to decline.



3 MOVING COWS FROM THE HOLDING PEN

- Minimize the frequency with which you enter the holding pen to move cows into the parlor. Ideally allow them to enter on their own.
 - a. If you frequently go to the holding area to get cows to enter, they will stop entering on their own and will wait for you to come get them.
- Position yourself near the parlor entrance to the side of the cows.
- Don't get behind the entire group – this tends to cause the cows to turn around or turn away from the parlor entrance.
- Apply the minimum amount of pressure to cause a cow nearest the parlor entrance to enter.
 - a. Don't then apply more pressure. Remember, only one cow can enter the parlor at a time.
 - b. Rely upon the natural tendency of other cows to follow the first cow.
 - c. Exhibit patience and remember that the rocking technique can be employed to apply just a little bit of pressure.
 - d. Remember to release or lower the pressure just a bit when the cows are doing what you want them to do.
 - e. Don't do things which might distract the cows from continuing to move into the parlor (for example, hand movements, loud noises, etc.).
- Take extra time to patiently teach newly fresh cows to enter the parlor.

4 SORTING COWS OR HEIFERS FROM A PEN

- Follow the principles outlined in Section 1 when sorting animals from a pen.
- Be sure to have the appropriate number of people for the job before you begin – neither too few nor too many.
- Always strive to cause a minimum amount of disruption to the pen. Anything that disrupts a cow's normal routine will lead to less milk in the bulk tank.
- Always use the minimum amount of pressure necessary, particularly when the animals are on concrete.
 - a. Using too much pressure may cause animals to begin to run, which may lead to injury of either the cow, the animal caretaker or both.
 - b. Use the rocking technique to apply just a little bit of pressure.
- Move cattle in groups.
 - a. Cattle are herd animals, and they become nervous when singled out.
 - b. It is often easier to allow a second animal to accompany the animal that you want, and then separate back the "extra" animal later.

5 LOADING COWS OR HEIFERS ONTO A TRAILER

- Position yourself near the entrance to the trailer and to the side of the cows.
- Apply the minimum amount of pressure necessary to cause a cow to enter the trailer.
 - a. Don't then apply more pressure.
 - b. Rely upon the natural tendency of other cows to follow the first cow.
 - c. Remember to release / lower the pressure just a bit when the cows are doing what you want them to do.
 - d. Don't do things which might distract the cows from continuing to move onto the trailer (for example, hand movements, loud noises, etc.).
- When loading a large group of cows:
 - a. Don't try to load the entire group at once; load them a few cows at a time.
 - b. Don't get behind a large group; pushing the cows in the back will not cause the cow at the front to move.

6 MOVING A NEWBORN CALF FROM THE CALVING AREA

- Always use caution when removing a newborn calf from its dam.
 - a. Cows instinctually protect their calves.
 - While it is rare for a dairy cow to aggressively protect her calf, it can and does happen.
 - When it does, the situation can become very dangerous, very quickly.
 - The fact that it is rare makes the situation worse, for it is unexpected and therefore the animal caretaker is unprepared to act quickly.
 - b. Engage two people to complete the job for human safety.
 - If a cow becomes aggressive, the second person can call for help and then assist the person in trouble.

7 WORKING WITH A BULL

- Engage two people to complete the job for human safety.
 - a. If a bull becomes aggressive, the second person can call for help and then assist the person in trouble.
- If you raise your own bulls, train them to respect humans from a young age.
- During training, and later in life, do not scratch bulls of any age on the head.
 - a. Scratching bulls on the head has the potential to cause them to “ask” to be scratched by butting people with their head.
 - b. This becomes a problem as the bull gets larger.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DAIRY CARE 365, CONTACT YOUR MERCK ANIMAL HEALTH REPRESENTATIVE OR EMAIL DAIRYCARE365@MERCK.COM.