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Slow and easy when working cattle

Ever notice that when you are in a hurry things tend to go wrong? You miss the turn off the interstate, get stopped for speeding, or get in a worse bind. Same thing happens when we are working with livestock.

The old saying "The only way to work cattle quickly is slowly" is definitely true.

I was reminded of this fact today as I was necropsying a nice feedlot steer on a beautiful spring afternoon. The calf had collapsed after being moved from one pen to another. A lesion in the throat indicated the calf had probably ran into the feed bunk and the swelling and hemorrhaging in the trachea resulted in a rapid death.

Normally, there is not a rush to move calves but this is spring and people were thinking that they really needed to get this done so they could get back to planting corn. Now we have lost time to get the calf out of the pen, have the vet come see what the problem was, and lost a really nice calf to an accident.

No matter what the rationale, there is not a good reason to rush working cattle.

Low stress handling has been promoted to decrease stress and improve the well-being of cattle. This concept goes beyond not using hot shots during processing. We know that stress can be detrimental to cattle so all of our interactions with them should be initiated with the thought of 'Is this going to be stressful to the cattle?'

Simple efforts such as feeding by the gate you want them to go out of the day before you move pastures will minimize the stress of gathering cattle.

Trying to rush through things tends to make things take longer anyway.

Former ISU Extension Beef Specialist Darryl Busby presented some data years ago regarding hot shots, football games and cattle. Everyone wanted to hurry up so they could be done in time to watch the game. But making cattle move faster in the back

was causing cattle to be mis-caught and increased their stress so implanting was difficult.

When Darryl forced the crew to put the hot shots down, the number of calves processed per hour increased. When things go wrong it takes more time to fix the problem that we could have prevented than the time we were hoping to save.

Lastly, mistakes can be expensive.

Losing a 1,000-pound healthy calf because we were in a hurry is an expensive lesson.

Other losses such as decreased performance or health problems because of increased stress can also adversely affect your bottom line. Evidence indicates that acclimating cattle and using low stress procedures will improve performance and health of calves.

As you are busy this spring trying to get everything done, make sure when you are interacting with your cattle that you take a step back and slow things down. You may even get finished sooner!



Need to update your BQA certification?

Attend a session in June.

See page 36 in this issue for the schedule.

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