Dairy Stockmanship; Moving cows to and through the parlor
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Management’s goal should be to bring cows into the barn or parlor as calm and as clean as possible at every milking!

Where is the leg located?

Is there a Problem?
Clean Calm Cows Require:

- Proper cow handling procedures
- Bedding management program
  - Free stalls
  - Stall barns

“While physical design can greatly facilitate cow performance & comfort, the most important component of cow comfort is the dedication of management to calm, gentle handling of the cows!”

Unknown speaker

Do you understand normal Cow behavior?

Cow Behavior

How do cow approach handlers or people in general?
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
**Cow Behavior**

What do cattle when they are moved to a new pen, yard or pasture?

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**Cow Communication**

1. Sight  
2. Hearing  
3. Taste  
4. Smell  
5. Touch

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**Dairy Stockmanship**

Best defined as the interaction of people and cows!

The interactions will be either positive or negative & all interactions will influence future interactions!

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**Dairy Stockmanship**

Further defined as:

Using low stress handling techniques relying on minimal use of strategically applied pressure
Factors that affect cows response

- Prior exposure
  - To both people & other cattle
- Distance between the person and cow or cows
- Natural or artificial boundaries
- Age of the animal
- Other competing stimulations
- Health & well being of the animal

Dairy Stockmanship Principles

- Cattle want to see you
- Cattle want to go around you
- Cattle want to be with and will go to other cattle
  - they will readily follow other cows
- Cattle like to return to places they came from.

Cattle have a strong “Herding Instinct”

- Isolation is a severe stress for cattle
- Cattle will follow the leader
- A group or pen of cattle have a very distinct “pecking order”, therefore avoid moving cattle in small numbers!

Normal Cow Behavior

- Flight zone 0 to 60 meters (0 to 200’)
  - Ideal position is at the edge of the flight zone then “enter and retreat”
- Pressure zone is outside of the flight zone & is very important!
- Point of balance is close to the shoulder or withers

Understanding the Flight Zone

- The blue area represents the animal’s blind spot. Avoid approaching a cow from this direction, as it will startle her and may cause her to bolt or kick.
- Work on the edge of the flight zone. To move a cow forward, move to position B. To stop her forward movement, move to position A.
- Point of balance. The point of balance, at the shoulders, determines the direction an animal will move when you approach her. To move a cow forward, approach her from behind the shoulders. To move her backward, approach her in front of the shoulders.
Pressure area is sometimes referred as he stimulus area.

Once a cow starts to move, less stimulation is required to maintain the movement.

Teach cows to “pass by”

Walking with cows tends to slow them to their normal gait.

People walk 3-4 mph, cattle walk 2 mph (4.8 - 6.4 kph) (3.2 kph)
Moving against cows will speed them up!

To Move cows out a gate

Start the cows moving by working the back of the group

Normal Cow Behavior
- Cattle have long memories!
- Stress hormone levels are close to the same for electric prod or yelling
- Cattle are very sensitive to high frequency noises!
  - Metal to metal
  - Doors and steel gates closing

Cow Handling Evaluation I
Step into a pen and observe cow behavior—cows are naturally curious and should approach.

Cow Handling Evaluation II
When cows are laying & resting, walk into a pen and observe if they get up quickly and move away. Properly handled cows will simply watch you and not get up to move away.
Cow Handling Evaluation III

Just after cows are fed in a fence line feeder, walk slowly by the eating cows about 5 to 6 feet away. Cows should not pull back quickly or move away.

Note the inquisitive posture of the cows when they see a little person! These cows are not afraid!

Cow handling

- Develop a plan to have interactions with animals beginning as heifers.
- Calmly walk through pens on a regular basis, talk to the cows in conversational tones-no yelling or whistling!
- Teach young cattle to move by you – work from the side

Cow Handling

Pre-fresh heifers will greatly benefit from seeing the parlor before they freshen
- Opportunity to condition them to moving to and from the parlor
- First exposure to the parlor with entrance and exit gates all open; the them explore!
- Opportunity to condition them to moving through a footbath

Calm Cows

- Move slower
- Less manure splash
- Will be more willing to enter the parlor
- Will have better primary oxytocin letdown
Points to Remember

• To work cattle quickly move slowly!
• Work cattle from the front to draw then to you
• Apply pressure when cows have a place to go
• Pressure from the side
• Train cattle to be comfortable to go by you and stay straight

Points to Remember

• Move in triangles
• Going with the flow slows down or stops their movement
• Going against the flow signals cattle to move or speeds up their movement.

Points to Remember

• If you are working cattle and they are not moving the way you want, reassess the signals you are sending; the cow or cows are not wrong!

Always Remember

• Cattle behave in predictable ways
• People who handle cattle should be able to predict the cows most likely behavior in given situations
• This requires a handler “THINK LIKE A COW”

Moving cows to the Parlor

• Primary goal is once movement is started; KEEP MOVEMENT GOING!
• Have an SOP dictating how cows should be moved:
  - Open gates from pen to traffic alley
  - Walk to the far end of the pen close to the feed lane - against the desired cow flow
  - Begin to dress stalls at the far end of the pen; removing manure from stall platforms, cleaning cross overs, cleaning water tanks, etc.
Moving cows to the Parlor

- Approach and retreat from lying cows to get them up and moving.
- Move back and forth across the alleyway, to encourage cow movement.
- Remember, working slowly speeds up the process of emptying the pen & moving cows to the parlor.

Consequence of moving too fast & using a cow persuader!

Aggressive pushing from behind should never happen! Often results in cows circling and then bunching!
Pushing not asking cows to pass by!

Moving cows into the Parlor
Avoid "cow persuaders"

Moving cows into the Parlor
Primary goal is once movement is started:
KEEP MOVEMENT GOING!

Move against the cows, hands at sides, no
whistling or yelling, conversational tones
only!
Almost correct!

Well shielded with a man pass

Shielded all across the front of the holding pen & the cow exit area

Any Issues with this shielding?

Rotary No Shielding at Entry

Cows only see the rear end of a Herd mate moving onto the rotary!
**Crowd Gate Modifications**

- Dual range pull relay
- Cable down each side of the parlor
- Buzzer in holding pen (not high pitched)
- Battery fence charger on crowd gate
Crowd Gate Fencer

- Power is only on when the gate is moving.
- Cows will move at the sound of the bell or buzzer.
- Cows will relax in the holding pen when no milk harvest technicians enter the pen to “push” cows into the parlor.

Crowd Gate Control

- Add a PLC controller
- Start the gate and move away from the cows for 1 to 2 seconds
- Stop the gate and then move forward the required distance (15 sq. ft./cow)
- Stop the gate and then start and move back 1 to 2 seconds.

Sometimes, even with the best of training, some individuals just don’t get it!

Why was the cow lying backwards?
What did you really SEE?

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