

Herding Versus Driving Cattle

Our topics for this week are:

- **Herding compared to driving cattle**
- **Training cattle to be herded**

Driving

Driving and herding are often used as synonyms, but they are not. Driving cattle is less organized and involves the use of some degree of fear. Moving cattle by cracking whips, yelling, and waving objects is driving cattle.

Driving cattle uses the method that group hunting predators use to move animals for a kill. It is the oldest and most animal-stressful means of moving them. At its core, driving involves positioning the cattle between the site to move them to and the handlers. Handlers then invade the flight zone, frightening the cattle to move in the direction desired. Driving cattle effectively toward a desired destination requires multiple handlers. Driven cattle often move at a pace faster than a walk.

Herding: Flight Zones and Balance Points

Herding

Herding cattle mimics the means that a dominant herd member would use to move other herd members. It is a less animal-stressful method than driving, but experienced handlers are needed to accomplish herding. A group of cattle can usually be herded just by a handler's presence within their personal comfort zone. Teaching cattle to follow is preferable, but many circumstances require herding. Herding cattle is accomplished by a rhythmic push on the periphery of the cattle's flight zone, followed by a slight retreat, slight push, slight retreat, etc. The pace of herding is at a walk.

Cattle should never be chased. If they are and they are successful in escaping to another side of a pasture or somewhere else they can find rest, they will always attempt to run and escape if their flight zone is approached.

Zones

There are 3 psychological zones around prey animals: recognition, flight, and fight. Recognition is the largest. The flight zone is the most important for herding. If the flight zone is aggressively invaded, the fight zone will be reached. Factors that affect the flight zone are the time of day and season of the year; the weather; previous experiences; presence or absence of herdmates and their proximity; the terrain; the presence of obstacles between the animal and the herder; genetic

tendency to be nervous or calm; the herder's size, angle of approach, speed of approach, and demeanor as well as the number of herders and dogs.

A typical flight zone for domestic cattle is an oval with a diameter of about 5 to 300 ft. Most dairy cattle have a flight zone of 5-10 ft. Beef cattle that are around handlers on a regular basis have flight zones of about 15-25 ft. Beef cattle raised in southern states in the U.S. have a larger flight zone than the same breed raised in northern states because of regular, close exposure to humans that occur in winter feedings in northern states.

Flight zones are dynamic, changing depending on current conditions and past experiences. The easiest method for a handler to reduce a flight zone is to wait, be quiet, and let the animals settle and adjust to his appearance and behavior. Squatting or turning sideways reduces a handler's silhouette and pressure on the animals' flight zone.

Balance Points

Cattle, like all herd animals, have a side balance point at their shoulder for other animals or handlers to signal movement forward or backward. If the handler is located to the side and forward of the cow's shoulder, she will back up or turn. If the handler is behind and to the side of the cow's shoulder, she will move forward.

The middle of the nose and middle of the tail are front and back balance points, respectively. When the handler in front or behind a cow moves to the left, a cow will move to the right. When the handler in front or behind a cow moves to the right, a cow will move to the left.

Initiating and Maintaining Movement

Methods for a handler to cause movement are to stare directly at the animals; facing the animals and increasing his profile (raise arms, spread legs); and directly approaching the animals. Stopping is achieved by removing the pressures to move, such as lowering the handler's arms to his side and standing at a 90-degree angle to the cattle.

It is best to herd in the morning after cattle eat. Hunger decreases tolerance to stress. When starting cattle to move from a rest, handlers must concentrate on getting leaders moving in any direction and after they begin to move, direct their movement.

If cattle are in an alleyway and cannot back up, a handler walking in the opposite direction to the cattle and close to them will encourage the cattle to move forward as the handler passes their side balance points. This can be repeated by the handler making a wide circle away from the cattle to again pass closely to them going in the direction opposite of the cattle's direction.

Cattle cannot determine if a handler has invaded their flight zone if the handler is directly behind them. Herding must be performed from an angle (ideally, 45 to 60 degrees behind their shoulder) that allows the handler to see an eye of the cow to be moved to ensure they can see the handler. The handler should zig-zag while behind the herd to get out of the blind spot and be seen alternately with both eyes of the cattle.

Factors that adversely affect the direction of movement are a desire to avoid icy, muddy, or rocky surfaces. Cattle will avoid new objects unless they have time to settle and develop curiosity. The location of others of their own species and especially their own herd has advantageous drawing power.

Handlers should be mindful of herd subgroups, i.e., leaders, dominants, and submissives. Although one handler can herd a large group of cattle, two handlers are more effective. The forward handler pushes on the herd leaders' flight zone. The rear handler pushes on the flight zone of straggling submissives. Handlers should move in straight lines with confidence and change directions with angles, not curves. Circling movements mimic predator behavior and should be avoided. Flight zone pressure on a dominant herd member will result in it moving toward the center of the herd. Handlers who herd cattle must apply pressure from the side behind the balance point of dominants, not from behind the group. Pressure on a low ranking herd member may cause it to circle the herd, and if sufficiently frightened, take off on its own. Submissives, including young calves, follow in the back of the herd. Trying to move a herd from behind will push the submissives into the dominants, an action that is socially intolerable and leads to the submissives being driven away by the dominants.

Reducing stress on herded cattle includes being moved by a familiar handler, looking away from the animals, pauses in pressing on the flight zone, occasionally taking a well-timed step backward, reducing the handler's profile by presenting a side profile, slouching, kneeling, or turning away. Fight or flight is decreased by dim light and rhythmic sounds and music, such as a low monotonous tone of singing, humming, or whistling. Fight or flight can also be reduced by leaving the agitated cattle alone for 20-30 minutes.

Herding with Horses, ATVs, and Dogs

Although cattle are less frightened by a handler on horseback than a handler on foot, they will more readily move if a horse and rider invade their flight zone. Horses increase the size of the herder.

Cattle should not be moved with an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV). The noise stimulates driving the cattle, not herding. ATVs cannot change directions abruptly and sharply enough to be very effective. In addition, ATVs require too much rider's attention to traverse the terrain, detracting from appropriate attention to herding cattle.

Well trained herding dogs can be helpful in finding and moving stray cattle on open range or in large pastures out of brush, but once the cattle enter a collecting pen, few dogs are useful. Herding dogs should generally not be used to move cattle in pens. When moving cattle a long distance, cattle naturally string out in a single file. They are easier to move in a long line than if they are forced to bunch up. This is different that the herding tactics poorly trained dogs attempt on moving cattle. Their presence around collecting pens can be distracting and disturbing to the cattle causing danger to handlers by stirring the cattle in close quarters. Dogs should never be used to herd cows with nursing calves. The only result is putting the mother cow in fighting mode.

Moving Large Herds

Large herds should be herded with 8 handlers (4 pairs). These are (from front to back) the point, swing, flank, and drag pairs. Prior training of cattle is very helpful. Older cows that herd calmly should be kept to role model younger ones. To control the rate of movement, handlers go up sides of moving cattle to slow the herd. To speed the herd up, handlers move down the sides of the herd.

Moving Bulls

Moving adult bulls require extra precautions. Trained dogs can be helpful in moving bulls by being a distraction to the bull if the bull gets aggressive toward the handler. Riding a tractor to move bulls is safer for moving bulls than being on foot or horseback. Handlers should work in pairs when handling bulls or beef cows with nursing calves and neither handler should ever take his eyes off the cattle until they are contained separately from the handler.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Herding cattle is quiet, controlled, and preferred movement.**
- 2. Driving cattle is based on fright and noise with little control of movement.**
- 3. Cattle need to be socialized to humans and trained to be herded.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.