

Cattle Handling Facilities: Crowding Pens, Bud Boxes, and Alleyways

Our topics for this week are:

- Primary facilities for handling cattle
- Cattle pens
- Bud boxes
- Alleyways

Primary Cattle Handling Facilities

A handling and restraining site should be along a central fence line to aid in moving cattle toward working facilities at a well-drained point. Fences near and in the working facilities need to be higher and stronger than pasture fencing. Well-designed alleyways and chutes are curved, solid-sided, constructed of the same material (including color and texture) throughout. The facility should be designed and maintained in a condition that eliminates gouges and cuts (bolt ends cut off, nails pounded in, sharp or jagged metal edges repaired) and is functional and relatively quiet (fence gates, drop down gates, and squeeze chutes lubricated and padded).

Lighting should be bright, diffuse lighting that does not glare into the cattle's eyes. Translucent plastic panels permit diffuse light that eliminates shadows. Dull, subdued colors should be used on painted areas. Lighting should become brighter toward the restraint stanchion or headgate. However, cattle should not be expected to move into direct sunlight that will impair their vision and raise suspicions of the unknown.

Balking in alleyways and chutes can be more carefully investigated by making a video at cattle height while walking through the cattle passages. The movie can be evaluated for noises, changes in flooring, visibility of handlers, glare of light, and other reasons for discouraging the movement of cattle.

Basic handling facilities for cattle include collecting pens, crowding pens, working alleyway, squeeze chute and headgate, and loading/unloading chutes. (Fig. 12.3) Alleyways, crowding pens, squeeze chutes, and loading ramps should have solid sides to block cattle's peripheral vision. Industrial rubber belting can be used on alleyway sides and squeeze chutes rather than solid fixed sides to allow direct access to cattle by lifting the belt as needed while still blocking the cattle's vision of the outside.

Pens

Types of pens can include holding pens, collecting pens, funneling pens, hospital pens, and quarantine pens. Pens should be numerous, small, and with good gates. Pen fences should be 5 to 6 ft high. For pens in which handlers may be in with cattle, there should be a 16-inch clearance at the bottom of gates that can provide room for a handler to roll under in an emergency.

Funneling of small groups of cattle into single cattle-wide alleyways can be done with crowding pens (tubs) or with small pens with precisely located gates called Bud Boxes.

Crowding pens work cattle with handlers on catwalks outside the pen and are safer for inexperienced handlers or when working with aggressive cattle. **Bud boxes** require handlers with

experience to be in the pen with cattle that enter a pen as a group through a large gate as they are redirected toward a small gate and into single file alleyway.

Crowding Pens

When using a crowding pen (“forcing” or “sweep” pen), a handler should not fill the pen/tub with too many cattle at a time. (Fig. 12.4) This prevents movement needed to turn and to go the correct direction into an alleyway. Most crowding pens for cattle have a 12-ft radius designed for 5 to 10 head, but inexperienced handlers tend to overfill them. When moving them into the alleyway, the large swing gate should follow the cattle and not shove them. Working fewer cattle at a time enables the entire job to take less time. Crowding pens for domestic cattle should be filled to $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Entrances to alleyways from crowding pens for cattle must gradually funnel them into the single file alleyway and not have a sharp angle between the crowding pen and alleyway. Crowding pen walls and gates should be solid to block cattle vision from outside distractions. The alleyway gate should be self-closing or have a self-closing latch.

Bud’s Box

A Bud’s box is a pen constructed of pipe rails or thick board planks with a large group gate and a small individual cow gate. (Figs. 12.5-7) The working principle is to bring cattle into a small pen via a large gate, close the large gate, and herd the cattle around the perimeter of the pen and through a small gate in a corner adjacent to the large gate. The small gate leads to a single file alleyway. The pen is typically 12 ft wide and 20 ft deep. If handlers move the cattle on horseback the width can be 14-16 ft. The depth can be up to 30 feet if used to fill transport trailers. The portion of the pen opposite the gates can be rounded or have blocked corners to turn cattle more easily and should permit visibility beyond the end of the pen so that cattle move into a pen without hesitation that a solid end would cause. Four to 20 cattle can be funneled at a time depending on their size and length of the exit alleyway.

Alleyways (Working Chute, Race)

Many procedures, such as vaccinations, spraying for external parasites, and applying pour-on insecticides, can be performed on cattle without restraining their head in a head catch (stanchion or headgate). They can be pressed together in an alleyway by using blocking gates and butt bars. Working front to back helps keep them tight together.

A working alleyway should have walls 5 ft high. If Brahman cattle will be handled, the height should be 66 to 72 inches. The center width should be 18 inches for small calves and up to 28 inches wide for adult cows. Large bulls may need up to 32 inches. The bottom should be 15-18 inches wide. Flaring the walls outward from the floor forces the feet of cattle to not spread out and helps prevent attempted turnarounds and associated balking. Alleyways should be curved with a radius of 12 to 20 ft that permits cattle to see only 2 cattle lengths ahead. The minimum length should be 30 ft, but very long alleyways allow cattle to stand in one place too long and some will lay down.

Working alleyways should have solid sides with a catwalk. Handlers should step up on catwalks away from the cattle are to prevent from startling them with a sudden appearance. Continually speaking in a normal tone also helps cattle be aware of handler presence and avoid startle responses. If solid sides could create ventilation problems, a 1-2 ft wide rail at cow eye height may be a useful compromise to a solid sided alleyway. The solid sides may also be flaps

of canvas or rubber which allow the handler to reach into the alleyway to help move the cattle, if needed. Emergency release panels allow cattle that go down to get out and regain their feet. The gate at the end of the alleyway should be made of bars and not be solid to allow vision of the outside and encourage forward movement to the end. Overhead restrainers 5 ft above the alleyway can stop rearing, turning around, and falling over backwards. Curves in alleyways should be mild enough to permit view of cattle ahead. No corner in an alleyway should be more than 30 degrees. Drains and grates should be located outside alleyways to avoid being a cause for cattle balking in an alleyway.

Alleyways should have drop down anti-backup gates rather than metal pipes (butt bars, slip rails), preferably worked with a control rope. If butt bars are used, they should block 6 to 8 inches below the average sized cow's tail head. Concrete in alleyways and crowding pens should be grooved in 8 inch squares or diamonds for better footing. Deep grooves should not be used in milking parlors or other daily traffic areas due to excessive wear on hooves.

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

- 1. Alleyways and crowding pens should have solid sides to reduce visual distractions to cattle movement.**
- 2. Pens that handlers may work in should have 16 inch clearances at the bottom of the gates.**
- 3. Handlers using Bud boxes need more cattle handling experience than those who use crowding pens.**
- 4. Alleyways for Brahman cattle should be at least 5 ½ feet tall.**
- 5. Alleyways should be curved to facilitate forward movement of cattle.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.