

The Importance of Animal Husbandry and Behaviour Monitoring

Uncover the importance of animal husbandry, low-stress handling and behaviour monitoring in supporting cattle health. In the feedlot, good animal husbandry and effective stockmanship can be key to preventing disease and promoting animal health. Monitoring animal health and implementing low-stress handling techniques can also be key for disease detection and prevention.

Preventing Disease with Good Animal Husbandry

Good animal husbandry practices prioritize water, pen conditions, cleanliness and low-stress handling. Creating a clean and calm environment supports good animal health and cattle well-being and helps prevent disease and detect illness. Good animal husbandry includes:

- Providing plenty of clean and fresh bedding to ensure animals maintain good hygiene and health—cattle that are kept clean and dry are referred to as high performing cattle.¹
- Providing constant access to fresh, clean water and ensuring that it is accessible to all livestock in the pens—water is the most important nutrient on your feedlot.²
- Providing high-quality, fresh feed that meets the nutritional needs of your cattle—during acclimation, your cattle should be shown the location of your feed bunk.³
- Ensuring that pens and handling facilities are dry and clean—the design of your facilities should be frequently evaluated ensure there is access to fresh feed, clean water, dry pens and plenty of bedding and space.³ A clean environment support disease prevention and cattle comfort.²
- Implementing low-stress handling techniques that promote a calm and trusting environment for cattle animals are healthier and more productive when low-stress handling is implemented (see more below or visit our low-stress handling page).²



Low-Stress Handling and Effective Stockmanship

Effective stockmanship is rooted in the low-stress and calm handling of livestock on the feedlot. Strong stockmanship techniques and practices have a direct impact on cattle health and disease prevention. When cattle trust their handlers and their environment is well-maintained, they are more likely to have better health outcomes and improved performance.⁵

Effective stockmanship starts with body language, communication and respect. In simple terms, it is about creating a trusting relationship between people and cattle. When you follow the natural instincts of cattle, understand their body language and instincts, and learn their habits, you are better equipped to manage the operation, minimize stress and promote animal health. Some tips for low-stress handling include:

- A “nothing in the hands” approach—no prods, pokers or hot-shots.⁶
- Working with the animal’s natural movements and behaviours—following their lead rather than trying to get them to follow yours.⁶
- Avoiding shouting, sudden movements and unnecessary noises. Cattle should always be approached in a calm manner, keeping movement at a natural pace.⁶
- Approaching cattle from the front of the group while maintaining a calm demeanor—cattle want to see you and understand you.⁶
- Respecting the “flight zone” (personal space) of cattle—approaching an animal from outside their flight zone will encourage them to turn and face you.⁷
- Creating a relationship with the animals—utilizing your knowledge of cattle paired with your powers of observation.⁶
- Encourage movement and exercise throughout the pen and support cattle in trusting the entire environment of their pen (from water sources to every corner of the pen).⁶
- Find guideposts in your group (animals that are connected to you and keep their eyes on you) and use them to help guide the rest of your animals.⁶
- Help acclimate new cattle and never work them for too long (three to seven minutes is a good benchmark for acclimation attempts, come back if you are not making progress).⁶

Learn more about low-stress handling, the basics of stockmanship and acclimation here.



Tips for Meaningful Monitoring

Monitoring your livestock's behaviour allows you to proactively identify opportunities for improvement at your operation and better detect early signs of illness or disease on the feedlot. You can also increase the likelihood of a full recovery with earlier treatment windows. Some tips for proactive behaviour monitoring include:

- Routinely monitor your livestock—cattle will naturally disguise and hide signs of illness, so it is important to keep a close eye on minor changes in behaviour, habits and performance.⁸
- Watch out for the three cardinal signs of stress—lethargy, a decrease in feed consumption and an increase in disease incidence—and monitor water intake to help you identify early signs of illness or disease.
- Provide opportunities for movement and exercise—this will help you build trust with the cattle and become more familiar with individual habits—helping you better detect animals who are showing early signs of illness (i.e., isolating from the group, reduced feed intake, a poorly groomed appearance, etc.).⁴
- Get familiar with your cattle so you can better identify signs of BRD or other illnesses—build a relationship with them, create trust, review their records and keep a close eye on their condition. Cattle who trust their handlers are much more likely to show them how they truly feel.⁹

When you implement good animal husbandry, low-stress handling techniques and effective stockmanship, you lay the foundation for healthier cattle and support the prevention, detection and treatment of illness and disease.

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