



October 2019

Listen Up: Don't Let Livestock Take You Down



As a farmer, you can't live without livestock, but learning to live with them, and work safely around them, is critical for you, your workers and your family.

Cattle

"With feeder cattle, having large groups in confined spaces can pose risks for trampling and crushing," said Charlie Christie and chair of the Alberta Beef Producers and a rancher from Trochu, Alberta. "Make sure you always have an escape route, whether by climbing or using escape slots in working alleys."

When cows are calving, the mother will be very protective of her babies, so be sure to keep her separate from the calves. Many ranchers today use a "shark cage", which is a pen on wheels that can be popped over the calves and keep workers safe. If using horses to rope calves, work in pairs where one person keeps the cow away while the other tends to the calves.

"As for bulls, we don't trust them at all," said Christie. "No matter how docile they are, never turn your back on them and be sure there is a safe way out if needed."

Those working in chutes should watch for pinch points. When popping the chute gate open, farmers are advised to look for a handle that could whack them in the head.

"I know a lot of people who pushed their hand through the chute to push the animal forward and it moved quickly, snapping the person's arm in the process. It's crucial to understand ahead of time how things will move."

The most common mistake with cattle is making loud, quick movements that startle them. "Stay calm, use common sense and do your best to not rile your animals. Keep in mind that cows can kick as far to the side as they can out behind: don't walk up to them quietly and whack them on the butt. The bottom line is treating them with respect, giving them their space and not taking chances with your safety."



Pigs

Though pigs are usually quite calm, there are notable exceptions.

"Bigger animals like gilts and sows can be more agitated when farrowing," said Martin Waldner, a director with Alberta Pork and barn manager for Hartland Colony. "When feeding those animals, be careful as you reach in the stall that they don't bite you. If catching piglets for processing, watch that the sow doesn't throw your hand against the stall and bruise or break it."

In moving large pigs, always use a chase board for protection in case they turn around and want to go back the way they came.

"The chase board allows you to block their view, and if they can't see a way to get by you, they are less likely to try," said Waldner. "If you let them see past you, there's no chance of stopping them and they will run right over you."

Boars can often pose the biggest hazard once they're out and about.

"Our boars are tame in the pen, but when you move them from their comfort zone they can get very aggressive. Never position yourself where you are cornered or cornering the boar, as its tusks can rip you open pretty quickly."

Having the proper safety gear can keep hazards at bay. Wear earplugs in the barn to protect against the noise, and don safety goggles for tasks like welding. During power washing, use

gloves with good grips so the high pressure wand won't slip from your hands and do damage to yourself or others.



Poultry

The main safety hazards with poultry come with installing or repairing equipment such as feed augers, working with machinery like skid steers, driving, working at heights (such as with feed bins) and handling hazardous materials.

“When installing or repairing feed augers, there is a danger of entanglement and loss of fingers,” said Erna Ference, vice-Chair of AgSafe Alberta. “In working with, repairing or moving equipment like skid steers, risks include damage to hearing, rollovers, electrocution and hitting other pieces of equipment or people.”

Addressing these dangers on farm is about observation, communication and problem solving.

“Staying safe starts with developing awareness of hazards present in your farm’s environment,” said Ference.

“From there, it’s essential to relay that knowledge to your staff and develop practical solutions as quickly as possible. The worst thing you can do is fail to take the time needed in considering all possible outcomes of a situation.”

Whether you work with cattle, pigs or poultry, investing a little time and effort in staying safe today can pay big dividends down the road for you and those in your charge.





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FARM & RANCH SAFETY TIP: WATCH THE KIDS

The often untold story of farm safety has less to do with the workers themselves, and more to do with kids. As family-centric operations, farms will have young children around much of the time. Unfortunately, the number of child deaths on farms in Canada and around the world is staggering. The biggest threats are getting run over by a machine, drowning, machine rollovers, and animal-related incidents. So be extra-vigilant when it comes to child safety and always know where all kids are at all times. Install fencing around ponds and streams, and ensure everyone onsite knows to keep kids away from the machinery!



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Ag Safe Alberta is an agriculture based safety organization that is results-oriented, accountable and transparent to our stakeholders with focus on continuous improvement and best practices.

The overall goal of Ag Safe Alberta is to empower farmers and ranchers to integrate practical safety management programs into their everyday operations, in order to prevent illness and injury for everyone involved on the farm.



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