

Raising Livestock Has Many Hazards

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Startled animals, manure gases, diseases, loud noises, and a lot of dust make raising livestock a dangerous occupation, said Ohio State University Extension Veterinarian Gary Bowman.

One out of every six injuries on the farm involve animals. No animal, no matter how gentle, can be completely trusted, especially if it is being subjected to something out of the ordinary.

"A dairy cow may let you handle her udder with no problem, but she may have a completely different personality if you're going to look at her foot," Bowman said.

When an animal gets excited or startled, it is not uncommon for a handler to be bitten, bruised, kicked, or run over. The mothering instinct makes female animals especially aggressive when producers handle newborns, and male animals can become hostile if someone interferes with breeding. In general, livestock producers should always be cautious and shouldn't trust bulls or boars, Bowman said.

Some animal breeds are more aggressive than others, so handlers should be aware of breed characteristics and dispositions.

"I've seen beef cattle remodel too many barns by crashing through fences or running into walls," Bowman said.

Even facilities can play a role. Poorly maintained chutes, fences, stalls and ramps make animals think escape is possible, so they become more active. Veterinarians often treat or diagnose animals in areas not designated for hospital work, and when the animals make sudden movements, the veterinarian get an accidental needle puncture.

Some things handlers can do to prevent animal aggression are to talk softly to them, approach them from the side and know their blind spots, be patient and don't make loud noises or quick movements. A nervous appearance, intent gaze and erect ears are common clues an animal is uneasy.

The animal environment itself poses some threats to producers. Handlers should be wary of certain livestock diseases that can spread to humans. Brucellosis and leptospirosis, for example, cause abortion, weak offspring, and lower conception rates in cattle, swine, sheep and goats. When transferred to humans, the result is fever, chills, sweating, weakness, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Producers should take proper preventative measures when working with sick animals to avoid becoming ill themselves, Bowman said. These measures include wearing plastic gloves when assisting an animal with birth, avoiding urine or birth fluid

splashes, proper cleaning of contaminated areas, and treating animals promptly if signs of disease appear.

Some dairy and pig operations store manure in pits until it can be properly spread. Gases, such as methane, ammonia, carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulfide, can be released from the concentrated manure and suffocate or even kill humans and animals if not properly maintained.

"Hydrogen sulfide, which has a rotten egg smell, can cause unconsciousness in less than 30 seconds and death in minutes," Bowman said.

Prolonged exposure to manure pit gases at fairly low levels isn't immediately dangerous but can irritate the eyes, nose, mouth and throat or cause sneezing, loss of appetite, or pneumonia. When working around manure storage areas, people should make sure the area is properly ventilated, Bowman said.

Dust and noise also are problems in confined livestock operations. Some chronic effects of working in a dusty atmosphere are lung congestion, headaches, nasal irritation, cough, and shortness of breath. Masks or air filters should

be worn when dust levels are high, he said. Prolonged loud noises, such as pigs squealing and machinery, could cause hearing loss that can be avoided with the use of ear muffs or plugs.

Although most animal-related injuries are not fatal, many people are needlessly injured each year because of a lack of safety awareness, Bowman said. To reduce exposure to livestock accidents or illness, understand animal behavior, provide proper and safe facilities, protect against transferable diseases, and wear personal protective equipment.

Milk Labels To Feature More Accurate Descriptive Names

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — If you enjoy milk but prefer to buy low-fat products, new labels on milk containers will help you to make the right choice, said a nutrition expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

J. Lynne Brown, associate professor of food science, explains that effective Jan. 1, 1998, the Food and Drug Administration will no longer allow 2 percent milk to be called "low-fat." Instead, this milk category will be called "reduced-fat" milk.

"The dairy industry originally asked for an exemption from

the terms of the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act, because the industry felt the public had strongly identified with 2 percent as a healthy product," Brown said. "The new labeling will help the dairy industry in the long run because people are interested in low-fat products, and consumers like consistency in labeling."

The FDA definition of "low-fat" is 3 or fewer grams of fat per serving. A serving of milk is one 8-ounce glass. Brown says whole milk has 8 grams of fat per serving. Milk labeled 2 percent contains 5 grams of fat per serving, which means the dairy industry must label 2 percent milk as "reduced fat."

"Milk labeled 1 percent has

2.5 grams of fat per serving, so it can be called a low-fat product," Brown said. "Skim milk has .5 or less grams of fat per serving, which fits the FDA definition of a fat-free product. It still will be called skim milk."

Brown points out that dairies can still list fat content on the front of the milk carton as 1 percent or 2 percent, but the 2 percent products cannot be advertised or labeled as low-fat.

"The new labels make the fat content claims of dairy products comparable to other foods," Brown said. "The dairy industry will really have more flexibility in differentiating its low fat and fat-free products, and consumers can make a more informed choice at the supermarket."

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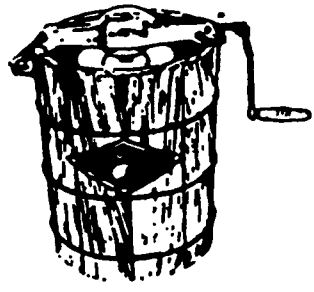
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