

Bud Box Bonanza

A rancher's simple handling layout cuts costs and decreases stress.

by **Boyd Kidwell**

Cattle handling is steadily changing as the old ideas of driving animals with shouts and hotshots gives way to low-stress techniques using animal behavior to quietly move animals.

Using a Bud Box to replace a sweep gate and crowding tub in the ranch's handling system is not only easy on the animals but saves time and money at Schmidt Land and Cattle Co. of La Grange, Texas. Ranch owner Ralph Schmidt and his son Rodney saved \$15,000 by working with Texas Extension livestock specialist Ron Gill to renovate their existing handling system with a Bud Box instead of buying a new crowding tub and building curved alleys.

The Schmidts installed a 16 x 24-foot (ft.) Bud Box so the crew can ride horses or work on foot as they move cattle through the Bud Box and into the alley leading to a Silencer™ hydraulic squeeze chute.

"When you use a sweep gate and crowding tub, you force cattle to go where you want them. With the Bud Box, we aren't fighting cattle; we use the animals' instincts to move where we want them to go," says Rodney, the ranch manager.

Schmidt uses the Bud Box nearly every day as the ranch crew handles 2,500 calves a year in a preconditioning operation plus the cattle in the Schmidt's

200-cow commercial operation. Bud Boxes make the handling and loading operations low-stress for calves, and reduced stress leads

to better health. Many of these calves are destined for Irsik & Doll Feed Yard, a four-time national award winning Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) partner.

"The Bud Box takes time and patience to learn how to use, but it's part of our strategy to keep cattle as calm as possible. We think low-stress handling pays off all the way through the feedlot," Rodney Schmidt says.

Low-stress is buzzword

"Low-stress handling is the buzzword these days, and manufacturers are designing equipment to take advantage of cattle instincts and handle animals with less stress," says Gill, who helped the Schmidts plan their layout.

After years of working with cattle and producers, Gill says there's no magic handling system that works for every operation. In Gill's experience, the stockmanship abilities of people working the cattle are as important as equipment design. Gill shares tips for handling livestock at www.effectivestockmanship.com.



PHOTO BY BRETT JANECKA

► Ralph Schmidt (left) and Rodney Schmidt (right) saved thousands of dollars and reduced stress from handling cattle by building a Bud Box.



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After noting that site selection and design is important no matter what kind of system is built, Gill is a fan of Bud Boxes. He uses the boxes on ranches where he manages cattle.

"A Bud Box works so slick it's not even funny," Gill says. "But you can work it the wrong way and have problems. Keeping the animals moving is critical. Cattle should never be stored in a Bud Box or in a tub. If you keep the cattle moving, they'll go right through your system."

North Carolina Extension veterinarian Mark Alley is busy introducing the Bud Box concept to Southeastern producers. Alley recently demonstrated a Bud Box layout for the Cattlemen's Boot Camp hosted by the American Angus Association and North Carolina State University (NCSU) at the NCSU beef unit.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 164



► Mark Alley demonstrates low-stress handling with a Bud Box system at the 2010 Angus Boot Camp at North Carolina State University.



► Cattle remain calm as they go through a Bud Box and enter an alley to the squeeze chute.

PHOTOS BY BOYD KIDWELL

Design time

Bud Williams of Independence, Kan., is credited with designing the Bud Box and presenting it to producers. Bud and his wife, Eunice, host stockmanship schools across the country to teach low-stress handling techniques.

For a long time, Williams didn't encourage producers to use Bud Boxes unless they were willing to learn low-stress methods of handling cattle. Because so much has been written by others about Bud Boxes, Bud recently wrote an article on his website (www.stockmanship.com) describing the right way to build and use Bud Boxes.

Here's a brief version of Bud's recommendations:

When designing a Bud Box, keep in mind that you want to take the cattle past the opening to the single-file chute where you ultimately want them to go. You want the opening to the single-file chute close to the gate where the cattle enter the Bud Box.

Bud Boxes depend on the concept that cattle want to go back the way they came from. When cattle enter a Bud Box and reach the dead end, the animals will naturally turn and head back. As the handler, you should be positioned near the chute entrance in such a way that when the animals go around you, they will be going into the single-file chute. You can either be in the pen with them or outside the pen.

It's best to bring the animals down the alley and into the Bud Box at a trot. This energy coming into the pen helps the animals want to go back. If the cattle have been standing on the other side of the gate before entering the Bud Box, they have little movement to help you put them into the chute.

The thing that makes this concept work is when cattle come to the dead end they naturally want to go back. You have to pause for a

few seconds and give the animals a chance to decide to turn around and then pressure them lightly against the dead end. At this point, you should be standing very close to the entrance to the single-file chute. Since cattle don't want to turn their backs to you, the animals should turn right around and head into the chute. If you accidentally bring more animals than will fit into the single-file chute, open the gate and let the excess cattle go back to the bunch.

The most common error people make when using a Bud Box is to go around the cattle and try to drive them to the chute entrance instead of pressuring the animals against the back end of the box and letting the animals decide for themselves to go back to the chute entrance. Driving cattle totally defeats the principals of the Bud Box.

The Bud Box pen should be built as a rectangle, and the entrance to the single-file chute should not be slanted to make a V. You want a square opening so cattle enter in single file. A "V" entrance encourages two animals to enter at the same time and, when they get stuck, both animals want to back out.

For loading trucks, the box should be 14-feet (ft.) wide and 28 ft. to 30-ft. long. These dimensions work well either on foot or horseback and make a pen large enough to hold the number of cattle that go into large truck compartments. A 14-ft. by 20-ft. Bud Box is usually a good size for sending cattle into a single-file chute leading to a squeeze. The Bud Box should be fairly open so animals will go into the pen easily. Cattle usually enter the box easily when coming from a 12-ft.-wide alley into a 14-ft.-wide pen.

A longer version of Bud's recommendations are on the Stockmanship website. The site is an excellent source of information on handling livestock and is a popular way for producers around the world to swap information.

"I wouldn't say a Bud Box is better than a tub/sweep-gate system," Alley says. "Both systems have their advantages and disadvantages. Because a Bud Box is built with straight lines and 90° corners, it may be easier for a producer to build. One of our main limitations to improving herd health is a lack of handling facilities on farms and ranches."

A Bud Box may also be easier to build with portable panels to make a temporary handling system, Alley points out.

West Texas box advocate

Donnell Brown of R.A. Brown Ranch, Throckmorton, Texas, is another strong advocate of Bud Boxes. R.A. Brown Ranch sells 600 bulls a year and routinely works Brahman-influenced cattle through Bud Box layouts. So far, Brown has installed four Bud Boxes for working and loading cattle.

"We absolutely love our Bud Boxes. This is the best way we've seen to handle or load cattle," Brown says. "Bud Boxes work well because we use cattle's natural instincts to put them where we want. From now on, every

cattle handling facility we build will include a Bud Box."

The Texas Angus breeder says that it's important not to bring more animals into a Bud Box than can be sent up the working alley or loading alley in one group. If there are too many animals for the alleyway leading from the Bud Box, excess animals should be returned to the

holding pen and returned to the Bud Box with a new group.

R.A. Brown Ranch typically markets 200 Angus bulls and 100 Angus females per year. Bud Boxes fit the ranch's philosophy of using low-stress handling techniques to maintain docility in the herds.

Words of wisdom

After 50 years of working with cattle, Bud Williams has developed a philosophy for stockmanship that extends beyond the handling facility.

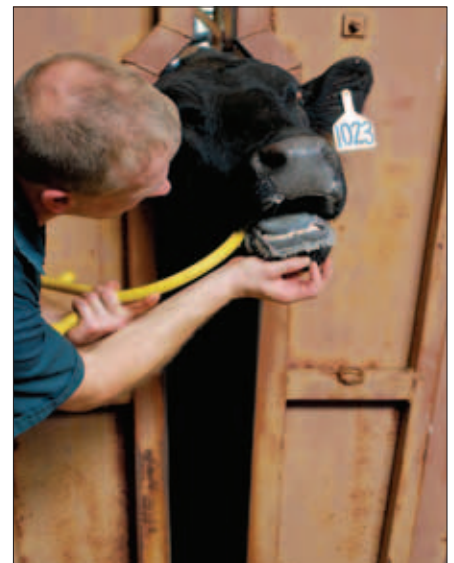
"If we keep animals confused and upset all the time, there will be health and performance problems. After many years of studying animals, it is my belief that their emotions have a lot to do with their health and performance — good or bad.

"After 20 years of working with and trying

"One of our main limitations to improving herd health is a lack of handling facilities on farms and ranches."

— Mark Alley

to teach people, I'm starting to believe that the emotions of the people working with the animals may have more to do with the animals' health and performance than the emotion of the animals," says Williams. "Learn to like all of your animals every minute of every day. Any animals that you can't like, get rid of them as soon as possible."



► Because Bud Boxes are simple and less expensive to build, Mark Alley hopes to see North Carolina producers perform more herd health practices.