

Galvanized guardrail plays a role in cattle handling and facility design.

Story & photos by **Corinne Blender**

The same galvanized guardrail that stops vehicles from careening down steep embankments along roadways has been used as a durable, cost-efficient, livestock-friendly building material for several

years, says Jon Carroll, owner of Butterfly Supply, centered out of Great Bend, Kan.

"It's been in pretty steady demand for the last four or five years," says Carroll, who says 99% of his used guardrail is

purchased for use in the ag sector. "More people have become aware of it."

The tie that binds guardrail and cattle is the desire of many producers to handle cattle in a safe, calm manner. It's been

boiled down to a science. Understanding cattle behavior and adopting practices that minimize stress during handling are now ways of business.

Producers can ease handling by using good facility design. And guardrail has quickly become a recycled resource that fits the needs of many handling practices.

"Most cattle go through a fence because they don't see it," Carroll says, adding that's not the case with guardrail. "They run right up to it and stop because they see it."

Guardrail also acts as an eliminating factor in situations where light affects cattle flow through a facility. Studies done by Temple Grandin, a designer of livestock handling facilities and assistant professor of animal science at Colorado State University, indicate cattle are fearful of harsh contrasts of light, which can make them more difficult to move through a handling facility.

In an alley or crowding area, guardrail placed at eye level with the livestock being handled acts as a blinder. The 12-inch (in.) rails virtually eliminate the cattle's view outside the pen, making handling and moving them easier, according to www.usedrail.com, a Web site provided by Calton Surplus, Rutherfordton, N.C.

The curved, smooth surface protects cattle from injuries as they are crowded in an alley or through a squeeze chute, says Tim Calton, who helps operate Calton Surplus.

Calton says guardrail can have several applications, ranging from building pens, alleyways, chutes and corrals to making tubs, dividers and reinforcements throughout an operation.

In use

Dave Pfenninger, owner of Pfenninger Cattle Co., Scott City, Kan., put used guardrail into action in his operation five or six years ago. Pfenninger knows the importance of handling cattle properly and minimizing stress factors. His

► Above: Recycling used guardrail as a livestock building and fencing material has seen heightened interest in recent years, says Jon Carroll, owner of Kansas-based Butterfly Supply.

feedyard is a partner in the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Feedlot Licensing Program (FLP), which prioritizes safe cattle-handling practices.

"I originally got ahold of the idea by visiting a friend in eastern Colorado and seeing it used in their operation," Pfenninger says. "They used it as their entire fencing, but we just use it as a windbreak."

To make the windbreak, he says they stack it five rails high and leave about 1.5 in. between rails to let wind pass through and to prevent snow from piling up.

"It is an advantage in the feedyard where cattle like to abuse and chew up things," Pfenninger says. "It's stout and they aren't going to abuse it. If there is an animal big enough to destroy it, then I don't want to be handling it."

Guardrail can be used as a permanent fixture similar to the windbreaks at Pfenninger Cattle Co., where the rails have been welded in place for their purposes. But, Carroll points out that guardrail is a versatile material and can be bolted or welded onto different products, such as used oil-field pipe, used railroad ties or large wood posts.

"You can put it up today, and if you want to change your pens, or are renting the land and have to move, you can go out there and unbolt it and move it," he adds. "The only thing lost is your labor."

When used as a fencing material, Calton says, many producers start with the first rail approximately 10 in. off the ground. The panels should be placed with a gap of 6-10 in. to prevent cattle from getting their heads caught between the rails.

Purchasing power

Pfenninger says it isn't difficult to locate used guardrail for sale. He purchased his rail through an ad in a farm trade publication. But Carroll warns that factors

outside the ag community control the supply chain.

"The demand in the agricultural community doesn't affect the supply," Carroll says. "It depends on what construction is being done on highways and the general economy of the states to allocate money for road budgets. That determines what's being taken down and replaced on highways."

Demand timing, however, will affect the supply and the cost. "The supply isn't infinite. There is only so much out there," Carroll says. "Farmers are like anyone else, they have a season for doing stuff. If it is during the busy time of the year, they are going to want to order it earlier."

According to Calton Surplus's Web site, the price per running foot ranges from \$1.35 to \$1.65, delivered. Purchasers of used guardrail can anticipate factors such as delivery distance, quantity desired, type requested, time of year and quality desired to reflect prices.

The initial cost pays for itself over time, Carroll says.

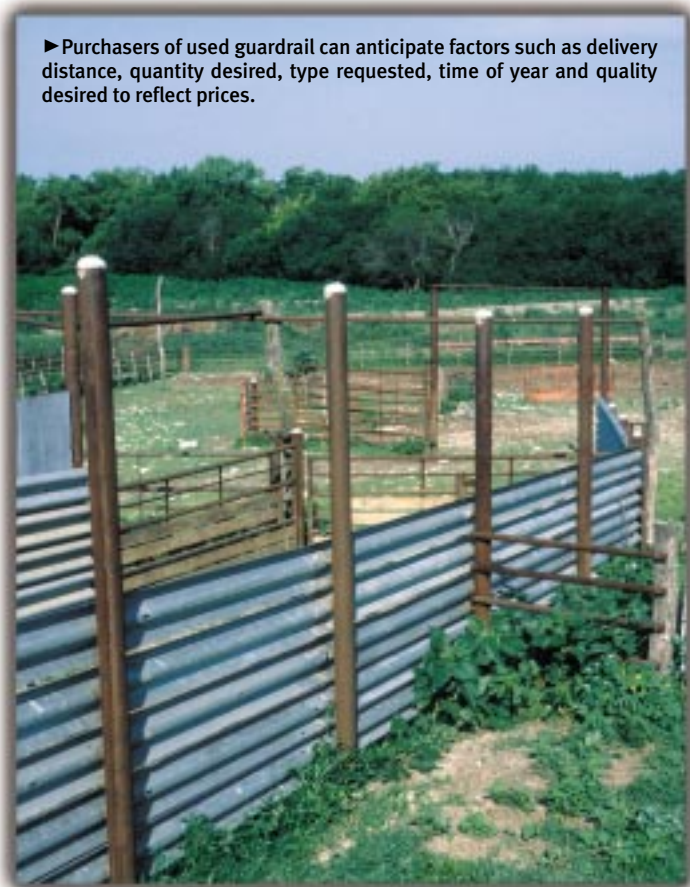
"It will be in as good of condition 25 years from now, and it will be one investment that you can always get your money back out of," he adds. "It's absolutely a lifetime maintenance-free fence. There is very little labor in putting it up, and you never have to do anything to it, unlike wood fences."

The most common way guardrail is purchased is by the truckload. But Calton will point out that most of the farmers around his area are small, but still purchased the guardrail to help build different aspects of their operations.

The same ease, strength and durability that make guardrail a perfect fit for protecting vehicles provides many of the same benefits when protecting cattle.



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