

Ruminating with a Purpose

Cattle handling is an art form, one perfected with the animal in mind.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

Cattle handling is a seemingly mundane lesson to learn, but the wise know it is the most important of all in a production setting.

Tom Noffsinger, veterinarian for Production Animal Consultation (PAC), posed the question, “why not make the cattle work for you?” in a cattle-handling workshop during Angus University, sponsored by Merck Animal Health, at Angus Convention hosted in Columbus, Ohio, Nov. 3-5, 2018.

Your responsibility

“I spent the first 35 years of my vet career on the wrong end of the cow,” Noffsinger said. “I got things done

but I did not feel good about myself. I was hoarse and my family had already gone in the house.”

Noffsinger quoted Gandhi in reference to the cattle industry: “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

As producers, Noffsinger said your responsibility to cattle is to provide the five freedoms: freedom from thirst and hunger; discomfort; disease and injury; behavioral interaction restrictions; and anxiety, fear and distress.

“Unless you can remove all fear and anxiety from cattle when they arrive, it is almost impossible to



Handling cattle is quickly becoming an art, backed by science. Tom Noffsinger, PAC Veterinarian, explained just how this is so during Angus University at Angus Convention.



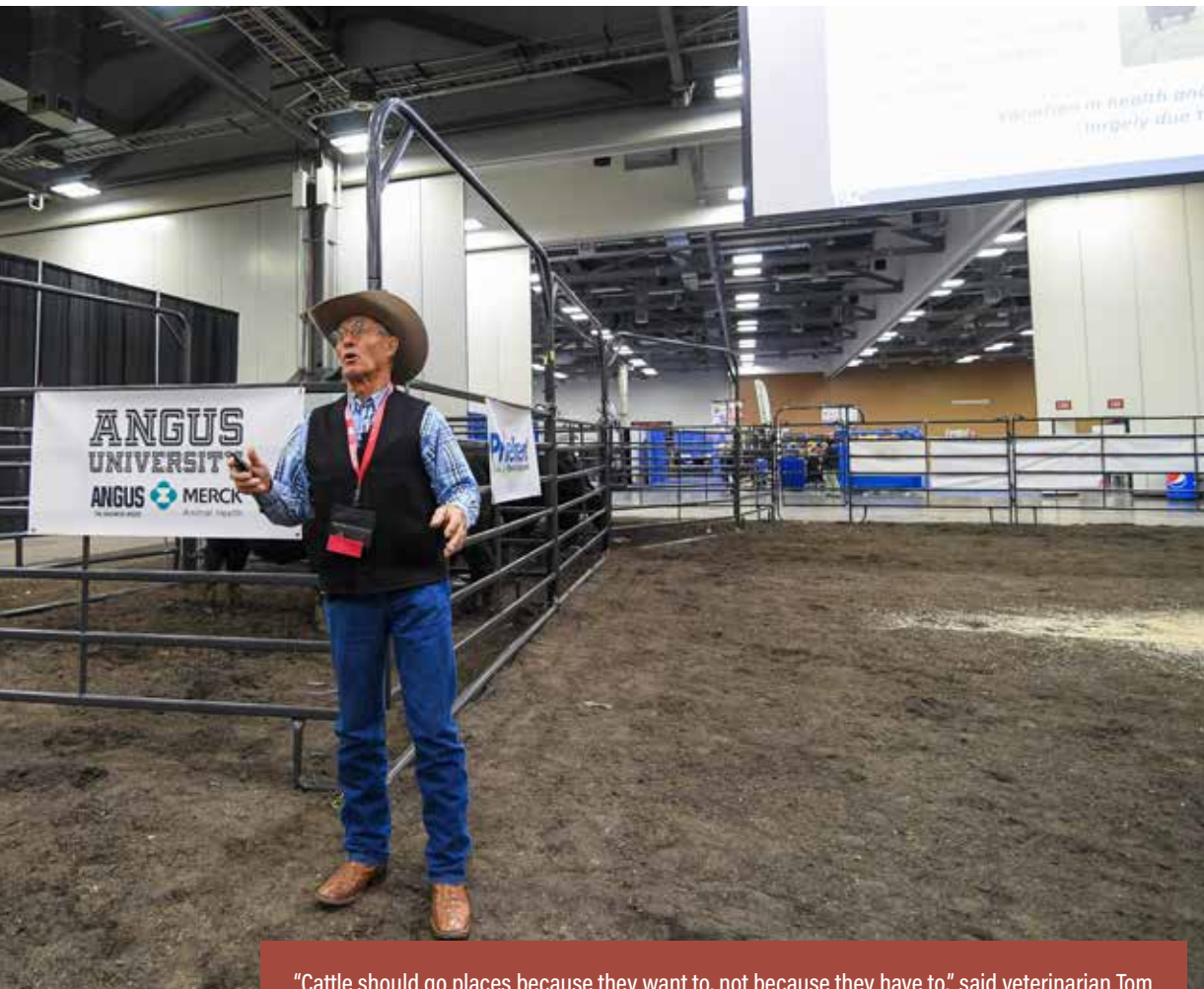
provide the other freedoms,” Noffsinger explained. “We need to remodel our attitudes about cattle handling and realize what is possible.”

Quiet handling

Variation in health and performance is a direct reflection of human interaction. Terrorized animals, intentional or not, simply do not perform.

Cattle handling is the basis, or demise, of all success in the cattle industry. Noffsinger demonstrated how quiet handling, working off the point of the eye instead of the shoulder, pays huge dividends.

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animals the focus turns to quality, not speed,” Noffsinger continued. “Understanding cattle behavior and sensory characteristics improves handling outcomes, even in undesirable facilities.”

Pen presence

When entering a new pen of cattle, Noffsinger suggested looking over the top of the them rather than directly at the closest animals. If an animal raises its nose in the air, you know you have too much presence in the pen.

“The point of balance on cattle is the shoulder, but if you are not visible to their eye then you are in the wrong place. The eye is the receiver,” Noffsinger continued. “If you are

working from her shoulder, you are pulling her head around. You need her body to be straight.”

Working off the left side of the animal optimizes a positive response since it connects to the right side of the brain. This side does most of the thinking, while the left side houses the fight-or-flight response.

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Part of building that trust is acclimating cattle to a chute. Noffsinger tells all his veterinary students to make sure heifer producers requesting Bang’s vaccinations have taken their animals

through the chutes at least once.

“We are not talking about making gentle cattle — please don’t take the movement out of your cattle,” Noffsinger pleaded. “Reward the stop though. When cattle stop and lick their lips, it means they are learning.”

Anytime the cattle go where intended, it’s a good time to reward that progression by stepping away from them.

“Her mind has to go before her body, there is no pushing on one when her mind has stopped,” Noffsinger said. “Being able to take an animal where they are hesitant is really positive. They never forget, but they always forgive.” 