



# Handle Them Right the First Time

BY JENNIFER WHITE

We've all experienced it. You're trying to get that pen of cattle worked before the sun goes down, and along comes someone who thinks the more they yell, scream and use the electric prod, the faster the cattle will move. You know the effect it had on you personally, but do you really know what effect it had on the cattle?

"The only noise people should make is a slight 'shhh.' Fear hurts production," says Temple Grandin, assistant professor of animal sciences at Colorado State University. A respected authority in cattle handling, she says stress during handling results in lower meat quality.

"Excited cattle produce tough meat and more dark cutters," says Grandin, who gives lectures to educate meat-animal producers on how to ease animals' fear. Her presentation is a regular feature of the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program's Commitment to Quality seminars for personnel of licensed feedlots.

"It is important that an animal's first experience with a person, place or equipment is good," Grandin says. "Initial aversive experiences can create permanent fear memory. Animals make very specific associations."

## Reason to balk

Clearing alleys of loosely hanging chains and debris will lessen the frequency of balking on the way to the squeeze chute or loading ramp.

"To observe distractions that stop cattle, the animals must be calm," Grandin says. "A calm cow will stand and look right at something in the chute that scares her."

Any rapid movements or small objects

with high contrast, such as coffee cups or plastic wrappers, will make cattle balk. If your alleys are clear and the cattle still won't walk through, there may be other factors to consider.

Grandin emphasizes quiet handling without the frequent use of whips or electric prods. Cattle can be handled more efficiently, actually faster that way, but positioning is of critical importance, she says. "People standing in the wrong places will make cattle balk."

It could also be the genetics. "You can see excitable genetics in a new environment," Grandin says. "Excitable cattle are much more sensitive to rapid movements and high-pitched sounds."

Facilities into which you are moving the cattle should have some light source, natural or otherwise. Cattle are more likely to go from a dark area to a moderately well-lit one than from light to dark. "Shiny reflections, dark shadows and a chute entrance that is too dark are other things that will cause balking," she adds.

If your cattle balk when handled, you may want to make some small and inexpensive adjustments to your equipment. Grandin suggests adding pieces of cardboard (or any material that does not flap) to chute sides to make for quieter entries.

"Cattle will move more easily through chutes and crowd pens with solid sides," she says. "If there is still difficulty, use paddle sticks or a stick with plastic streamers on the end — [electric prods] must be removed from people's hands."

Another way to ease chute entry is to walk inside the flight zone in the opposite direction of desired movement (see

illustration). "The principle is to quickly walk back past the animal in the opposite direction of desired movement," Grandin says.

Cattle also will enter the chute more easily from the crowd pen if the backstop closest to the crowd pen is either tied open or operated with a remote-control rope so it can be held open for incoming cattle, she says.

Once the cattle are in the squeeze chute, there can still be problems. When the squeeze is applied, cattle should not vocalize ("moo" or bellow).

"The hydraulic pressure can be set so high that there could be a danger of serious injury to the animal," Grandin says. "When cattle are kept calm by quiet handling, very little pressure is needed to hold them. A calm animal will walk in and walk out of the squeeze chute."

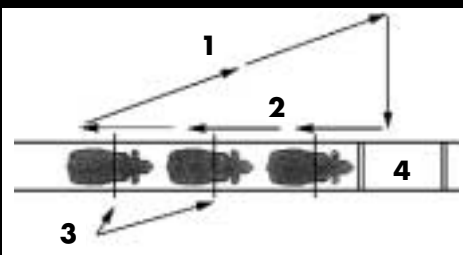
## Value in calmness

Remember, calm animals are more apt to produce higher-quality, more-consistent product. Appropriate handling can enhance the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>™</sup> acceptance rate in a pen of cattle.

Grandin says calm cattle also produce better postweaning gains.

Value-based marketing, through the many producer alliances and the CAB Program's Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP), provides the incentive for producers to take her suggestions to heart.

"I support alliances because that's how we are going to get a product on the market and compete with chicken," she says. "Good handling pays."



## Using the flight zone to move cattle

1. Return path leaving flight zone.
2. Path to move animals forward.
3. Points of balance.
4. Squeeze chute.

This movement pattern can be used to induce an animal to go into a squeeze chute. The handler walks inside the flight zone in the opposite direction of desired movement. The animal moves forward when the handler crosses its point of balance.

Source: Temple Grandin Web site: [www.grandin.com](http://www.grandin.com).