

Working Young Calves

Stockmanship experts offer tips to handle young cattle effectively.

Story & photo by Kasey Brown, special projects editor

Calves should be handled differently than yearlings and cows, said Ron Gill and Curt Pate during a stockmanship demonstration at the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, Ariz.

The pair has given numerous stockmanship and stewardship demonstrations and is a fixture in the live-cattle demonstration area of the NCBA Trade Show. Gill is a professor and Extension livestock specialist at Texas A&M University. Pate owns Curt Pate Stockmanship.

Gill explained that if cattlemen start working with calves earlier in life, even as cow-calf pairs, they will work more easily throughout their life. Work with them as slowly as possible.

The first interaction with an animal starts their training — “for better or worse,” he said. “We have to teach calves how to respond to us.”

Working cattle in a low-stress manner revolves around understanding pressure — both



applying and relieving it. There are three types of pressure when working cattle:

- driving pressure, which gets cattle to move;
- maintaining pressure, when you back off but are able to keep their attention; and
- drawing pressure, in which cattle want to be around other cattle.

Gill likes to draw cattle out from the front instead of going behind them, especially with young cattle. This lets them see you and see where you want them to go.

While working in the demonstration area, he suggested letting the calves get comfortable in every area of the pen or working area. Let them be comfortable enough to turn away from you, instead of

always having to watch you because they think you are a predator.

He does warn that often it is easy to be focused on a task, like opening a gate, while working calves. That actually undermines any progress you've made, because you've stopped thinking about the animals' behavior.

Placement of other people while working with calves can do the same thing.

“When we're working in a crew, we're all paid to help. We all want to help, but sometimes the greatest help is just staying out of the way,” Gill added.

To avoid bruising and draw calves around a gate post, Pate advised positioning yourself on the gate side, so the calves turn to see you. That kicks out their hip so they don't bruise themselves going past the gate.

Also know that stepping off of a horse when working cattle is not a bad thing. Calves need to learn to be close to you and go around you. **AJ**



Ron Gill and Curt Pate discuss methods for handling calves at the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, Ariz. They suggest letting the calves get comfortable enough with you to turn away from you, and that requires patience and slow movements.