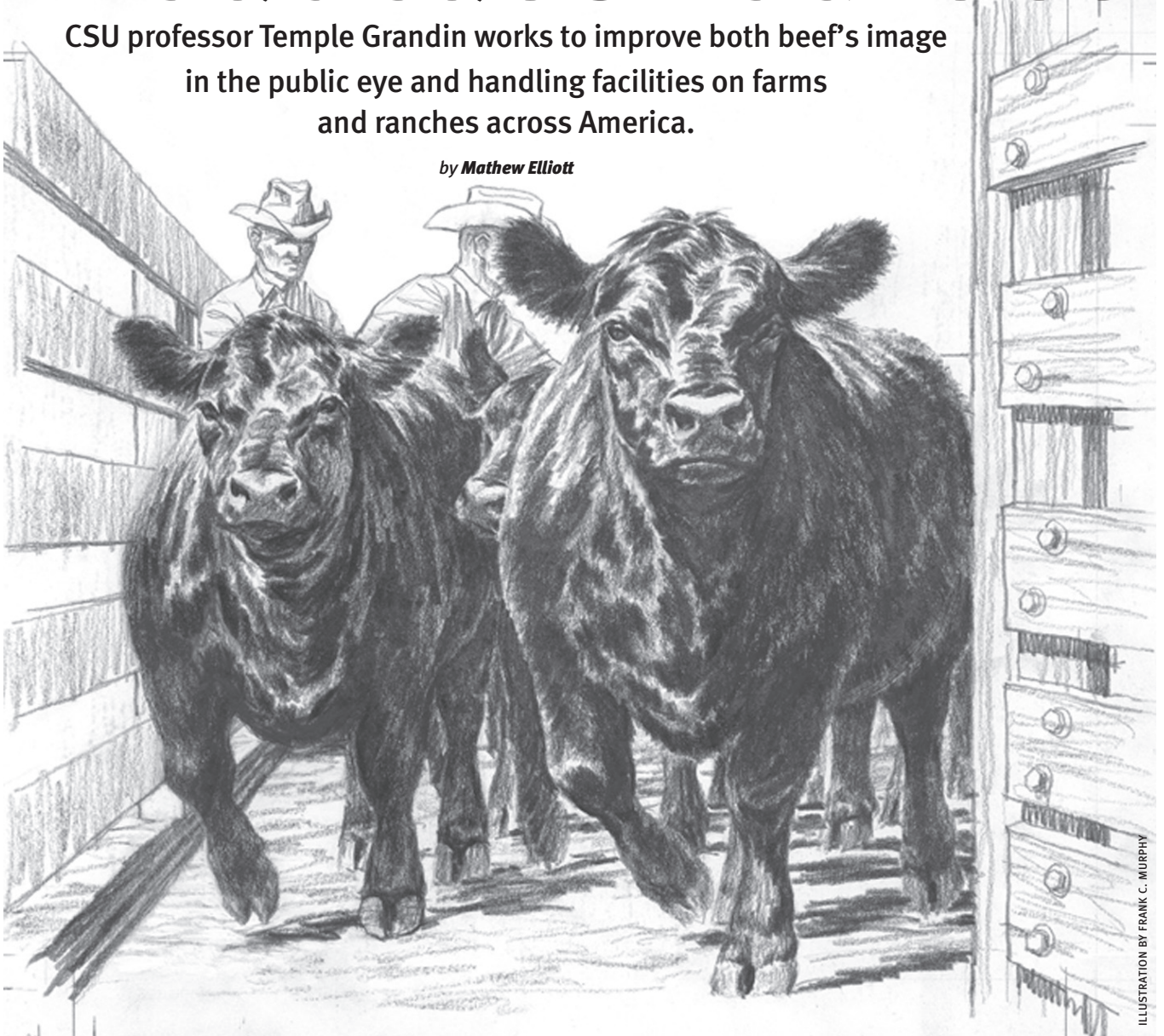


# Broadcast Yourself

CSU professor Temple Grandin works to improve both beef's image in the public eye and handling facilities on farms and ranches across America.

by Mathew Elliott



Visit an Internet search site — such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) or [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com) — and type a few beef industry terms into the search engine. Where does it take you? Does it show a nice seedstock operation in Iowa or a well-managed feedlot in Kansas? Probably not, and that can foster an image problem for the beef industry.

During Kansas State University's (K-State's) annual Cattlemen's Day earlier this year, Temple Grandin spoke on what cattle producers could do to change beef's image on the Internet.

"There's a lot of really good change that has taken place in the industry," said the world-renowned scientist in animal behavior and livestock facility design. "The

thing that the public sees is all the bad, bad stuff."

Grandin shared her experience visiting a web site, called YouTube,<sup>®</sup> that allows people to post and watch video clips. While visiting the site she typed in terms basic to the industry. For "cattle," the first couple of results were OK. For "feedlot," the third link was for horse slaughter. Search results for "dairy cattle" included some hard-core animal rights links, while results for "slaughter" were all bad. Searching for "meat" brought up several results Grandin said she "didn't dare click on using a university computer."

"We need to be showing our good side, like going out and saving a calf," Grandin

said. "Anybody can put stuff up on YouTube. It's total amateur stuff. We need to be getting our message out to the public.

"For the last nine years I've worked on improving the beef plants, the McDonald's, the Wendy's. They have made tremendous improvements, but yet everyone thinks Hallmark," she said, referring to the downer cow incident taped earlier this year by an animal rights group at Westland/Hallmark Meat Co., Chino, Calif. "That frustrates me.

"Corporate PR (public relations) is not getting the message out there," Grandin said. "The problem is when you get trashed, you need to be opening up the door, not shutting it. We need to think about everything that we do."

Grandin asked the audience what type of guests they would invite to tour a beef plant. How comfortable will your guests be? Will your guests be squirming and uncomfortable? Well, fortunately, a well-run beef plant doesn't have that many problems. It will pass the test of most consumers.

"I'm proud of the things I've designed," Grandin said. "I need to get that stuff on YouTube. We've got to communicate. This industry has a really bad 'stockade' mentality. What the public imagines is going on in agriculture is 10 times worse [than it really is]. We can't have this big mysterious shadow out there; we need to be showing this and putting it out there for people to see."

Grandin has devoted her career to improving animal welfare through an innovative approach to the design of working facilities and to educating producers in methods of cattle handling.

"One of the most important things when handling an animal is having a calm animal," Grandin said. "If an animal gets upset, it takes 20 to 30 minutes to calm down. The easy thing is not to get them upset."

### Eye on the facilities

One way to do that is to seek out in your handling system the things that animals are afraid of and remove them from the setting, she said. "They are not afraid of the same things that we are afraid of"

For example, Grandin noted that at five feedyards she had visited, all five had a chain hanging down from the chute, distracting cattle movement.

Changes in flooring can also slow cattle movement. "Cattle have lousy depth perception, and a change in flooring will cause them to stop and look down," Grandin explained. "Throw some dirt over it so they don't see the change."

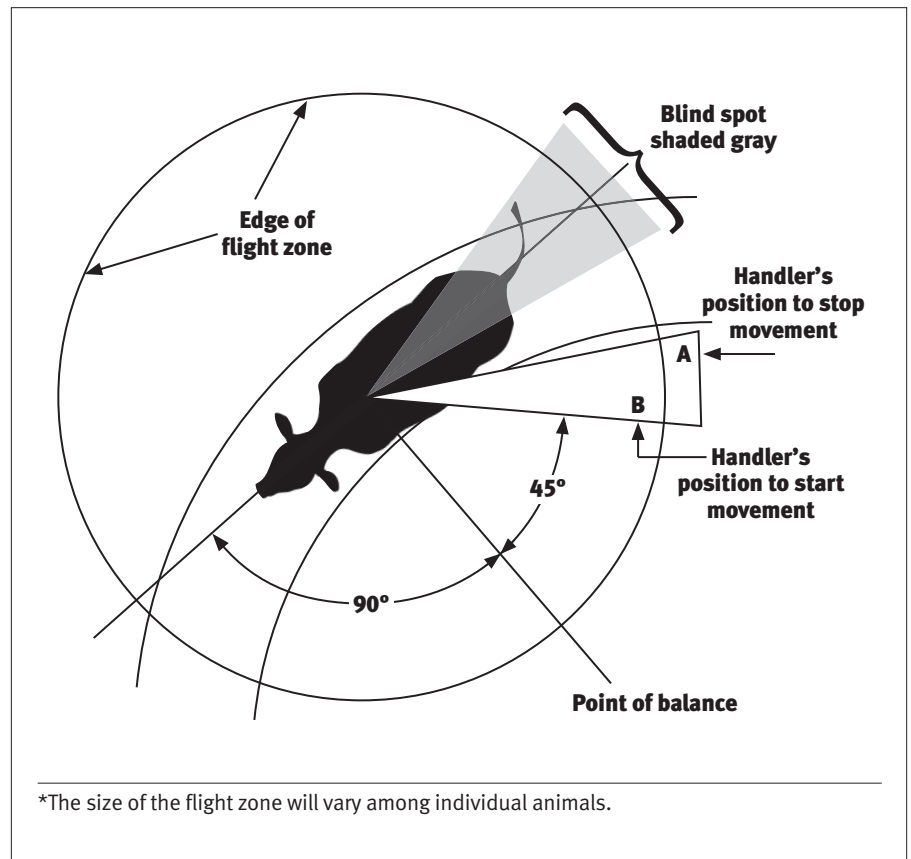
Reflections are another distraction. Grandin suggested simply changing the time of day you work your cattle if you are driving them right into the sun.

"I am amazed at how much cattle are controlled by their vision," Grandin said. "Get down in the chute and see what they are seeing. To understand animals, you've got to get away from language."

One way to get away from these distractions is to write down a checklist or follow one of Grandin's checklists available at [www.grandin.com](http://www.grandin.com). This will provide a list of things that commonly scare or distract animals. Examples are the "black hole" where it is sunny outside, but dark on the inside of the facility.

"Cattle don't want to go into that," Grandin explained. "I had one operation that wanted to tear down the whole facility. I told them to open a door and let some

**Fig. 1: Illustration of the flight zone of an animal\***



light in. It worked. Another thing they could have done was to take some of the tin off and replace it with translucent material. This will allow them to get rid of some shadows."

Grandin added that these simple steps can help reduce vocalization as well as resolve movement problems.

### Handling

Handling is another important part of keeping cattle calm when working with them. "I want to see the cattle walking or trotting," Grandin said. "I don't want to see them running and jumping."

A simple way to keep good handling involves realizing the point of balance on an animal. The point of balance is at the animal's shoulder. By simply moving in front of or behind the point of balance, the handler can move the animal by applying pressure. If a handler moves in front of the shoulder, the animal will move back. If the handler moves behind the shoulder, it moves forward.

Another important part of handling is understanding the animal's flight zone. This is a circle around the animal that can vary, depending on the tameness or docility of an animal.

If you enter the animal's flight zone, the animal will turn and walk away until it feels

that it is "safely" back in a comfortable zone. The more an animal has been worked with or tamed, the smaller the flight zone will be. If the animal has not been around people, it will have a larger zone and will move away easier.

In working with Grandin's recommended basic livestock handling suggestions, producers must be realistic; there are things that are acceptable and unacceptable. There's no way you can never have any bawling or running, Grandin said. But she emphasizes that you must put a number on it and not accept high levels of these things.

"The continuous variables [in animal welfare] are directly observable facts caused by either problems with facilities or problems with people," Grandin said. "Let's look at things we can measure right out on the farm."

"When I go out on my book tours, I'm leaving Kansas. It's not Kansas out there," Grandin said. "I recognize how important awareness is, and a lot of people do not recognize that yet. I'm proud of the stuff we do ... Why do we as an industry cover that up?"

