

# ON THE RANCH

## Upcoming Events

### Animal Welfare & Current Industry Issues for Livestock Producers

10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
at each location

February 6  
West Point, NE

February 7  
Lincoln, NE

February 8  
Kearney, NE

February 9  
Gering, NE

**For more  
information or to  
register contact  
Denny Bauer at  
402-387-2213 or  
[dbauer1@unl.edu](mailto:dbauer1@unl.edu)**

## Low Stress Livestock Handling for People & Livestock

By Steve Tonn, UNL Extension Educator

Handling livestock can sometimes be stressful for both people and the animals. A lot depends on our attitude, methods, and our understanding of how an animal behaves. Trying to load a balky horse into a trailer, gathering or herding animals in a pasture, or trying to pen or catch animals for treatment can all be stressful situations and even unsafe at times for all involved. But to reduce this stress on the owner and livestock try using low stress livestock handling methods.

The best way to handle livestock is to work in harmony with their natural behavior. Livestock see the world differently than we do. Because they are prey animals, their eyes are shaped differently and are located on the sides of their heads. Livestock have excellent peripheral vision. They have excellent distant vision, though they may have difficulty judging distances. Livestock also have blind spots where they can't see. A blind spot for horses and cattle is directly behind them. That is why it is extremely important not to approach a horse or cow from the rear without the animal knowing you are there. They may kick out in a defensive or protective manner and injure the unsuspecting person.

Livestock have a keen sense of hearing and also a good memory. Loud voices and yelling can scare animals more than clanging gates and chains. Animals may not be able to pinpoint where the loud noises are coming from but they are very disturbing to them. All loud noises can frighten animals,

even if we understand that the noise should not be an issue. Livestock have long memories. If they are handled roughly in the past they will be more difficult to handle and stress more easily. Try to make animals' first experiences with a new place, piece of equipment or person a favorable one. An initial experience that is aversive can create a permanent fear memory in that animal.

A good livestock handler understands two key principals: flight zone (the "bubble" around an animal that, if invaded, will cause the animal to move away) and the point of balance (the point, usually around the front shoulder, at which pressure in front of that point will cause the animal to stop or back up, and vice versa). When an owner is at the edge of the flight zone and properly balanced, only slight movements are needed to control the animals in a low-stress manner. To make an animal speed up, walk against their direction of travel; to make them slow down, walk with them. As you pass the point of balance, notice how each animal responds to your movement and position. This concept is evident



when many times it is easier to lead an animal by the halter if we are walking beside them near the shoulder rather than being ahead of them and trying to pull on the halter to get them to go forward.

A thorough understanding of the behavior of the animals we are working with is the first step towards developing an effective method of handling livestock. A good livestock handler is calm and patient. The golden rule of low-stress handling is slow and quiet resulting in less stress for you and your animals.

Try to use low stress handling methods every time you work with your animals. The idea is to start with low stress handling from birth and throughout the animal's life. It will be good for them and for you too.

There are many excellent resources on low stress livestock handling methods. Web sites, books, DVDs, are readily available and provide good information for using low stress handling methods for domesticated and wild animals. Contact Steve Tonn at 402-426-9455 or email [stonn2@unl.edu](mailto:stonn2@unl.edu) for additional information or a list of resources.

Sources: Dr. Temple Grandin, Colorado State University; Steve Cote, NRCS; Ryan Reuter and Kent Shankles, Noble Foundation; eXtension Horse, Susan Schoenian, University of Maryland; Ben Barlett and Janice Swanson, Michigan State University; Heather Larson, South Dakota State University, Ashely Griffin, University of Kentucky, Nebraska Farmer, October 2010.

## **Healthy Farms & Rural Advantage Conference**

**February 10 & 11, 2012  
Lied Lodge & Conference Center  
Nebraska City, Nebraska**

Keynote Speaker:

Fred Kirschenmann

Sessions:

Transitioning  
Raw Milk  
Nebraska Legislation  
High Tunnels  
Farm Bill  
SARE Farmers Forum  
Distribution  
Mobile Meat Processing Unit  
Pollinators  
Grassfed Beef, and more

To register call Nemaha County Extension Office at 402-274-4755

For up to the minute details visit, <http://nebsusag.org/conference.shtml>

## **Animal Welfare & Current Industry Issues for Livestock Producers**

February 6 - West Point, Nebraska  
February 7 - Lincoln, Nebraska  
February 8 - Kearney, Nebraska  
February 9 - Gering, Nebraska

Registration: 9:30 p.m. Program: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at each location

Cost: \$50 per person before February 1 or \$60 at the door

Speakers & Topics:

**Dr. Candace Crony**, Purdue University

- How societal views regarding animal care have evolved: Forces shaping those views
- The role of ethics in current farm animal welfare debates

**Dr. Dan Thomson**, K-State University

- Ag industry principles: Why do we do the things we do?

**Mr. Jim Robb**, Livestock Information Marketing Center

- Animal Protein: Global markets & issues

**Dr. Glynn Tonsor**, K-State University

- Economic aspects of animal welfare

To register contact Denny Bauer at 402-387-2213 or [dbauer1@unl.edu](mailto:dbauer1@unl.edu)