

FACT SHEET

Working with livestock

Issue

Farmers are at risk of serious injuries or even death when moving, separating, loading or unloading livestock, and undertaking animal husbandry. Contributing factors are poorly designed pens, unsafe animal handling practices, fractious animals and insufficient training. It's important to be aware of the risks and take appropriate measures to minimise the risk of injury.

Recommendations

Keeping workers safe

- Train your workers in the principles of cattle and sheep handling.
- Closely supervise new and inexperienced workers.
- Avoid working alone when loading or unloading stock.
- Ensure the operator is in a safe position when loading/unloading animals.
- When working indoors (eg in a shearing shed), ensure there is adequate lighting and ventilation.
- Reduce the risk of distraction – eg using a mobile phone – when working with livestock.
- Wear appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment.
- Have a first aid kit near the area of work.

Pens and yards

- Ensure latches, bolts and chains on gates are in good working order, and robust enough to contain stock.
- Design handling facilities to suit the number and type of livestock you have, and the type of work you do.
- Do not overcrowd stock pens. Fill pens to two-thirds capacity, to give stock room to move.
- Maintain facilities in good condition.
- Keep pens and yards free of any obstructions – eg protruding nails, bolts, wire, trip hazards – to avoid injury and ensure free-flowing stock.
- Use self-locking gate latches, where possible.
- Ensure escape routes are clear, accessible and clearly marked.
- Use animal-handling aids to move animals, where possible.
- Use crushes, head bails and cradles when animals need restraining, or when undertaking animal husbandry activities.



Cattle crush

Cattle

- Have a system in place to identify and manage difficult or fractious cattle.
- Disbud cattle early.
- Ensure the yard is well-designed, to assist the smooth flow of cattle.
- Ensure loading facilities have well-positioned gates, and consider adopting curved races and covered sides, to improve cattle movement.
- Use the natural 'following behaviour' of cattle to move them quietly and smoothly.
- Ensure loading ramp is not too steep or too slippery.
- Consider low-stress handling methods.
- Ensure the operator is in a safe position in drafting races.

Movement of sheep

- Sheep should have a clear, unobstructed view of the direction they are heading.
- Use wide laneways so that livestock can see the rest of the mob.
- Use wide gates to maintain good sheep flow, whenever possible.
- Ideally, sheep should take a familiar route and direction through the yards for all handling operations.
- Entrances to sheds, loading ramp, and dip should be placed along the route sheep usually take through the yards.
- Take sheep behaviour into account when positioning handling facilities – eg generally sheep will move towards the receiving yards in anticipation of escape or release to their paddock.
- Sheep move willingly around curves and corners into narrow races.
- Sheep move better on flat ground, rather than up or down hill – if the land slopes, movement should be across the slope rather than up or down.
- Sheep move readily towards light, and avoid dark areas, shadows and dead ends.
- Forward-moving sheep should not see the operator, nor other sheep moving into the yards.
- Ensure that the operator is in a safe position in drafting races.
- Use ramps with side rails and walkways to load sheep, where possible.
- Consider low-stress handling methods.

Further information

The Department of Primary Industries has more information on [cattle yards and equipment](#).

The design of curved cattle corals, yards, races and chutes is outlined in this [short video](#).



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