

Dairy & Livestock

Use caution when handling cattle

SPRING always brings a sense of rejuvenation as farmers return to the fields and cows are turned out to pasture. Many farms still calve out on pastures, and everyone enjoys seeing newborns take their first steps.

But this is also the time of year that those who work around livestock need to be extra cautious about injuries caused by animals. To highlight this need for caution,



Ask the Vet

By DR. MONTY BELMER

the Centers for Disease Control reports that from 2003-07, 108 deaths occurred in the U.S. that involved cattle as the primary

or secondary cause. A Wisconsin survey over a 12-year period shows that of 739 people admitted to trauma rooms because of farm accidents, 30% were due to farm animals. As someone who has been on the receiving end of a couple of these injuries, I believe it is important to review some of the dangerous situations that can happen.

Injuries from animals happen out of fear or aggression. When given the space, most

animals will move away from you. Most livestock we deal with are herd animals that like to stay together whenever possible. When separated from the herd, their tendency is to get back to the group. If you are standing in the way of an animal that is intent on getting back to the group, bad things are going to happen.

I have seen several farmers get hurt when they were pinned against walls or gates while animals were trying to escape. Human bones, joints and rib cages are no match for 1,600 pounds of moving bovine.

When moving animals, you need to leave yourself a way out. Do not allow yourself to be trapped in doorways or alleys.

Another opportunity for getting injured is when dealing with cows shortly after calving. The maternal instinct is to protect the young from possible threats. Most domestic dairy cows are OK to work around, but there is the occasional one that will set you on the ground when you get too close to her calf.

Be extra careful when bringing dogs into calving pens. Cows get very protective when dogs are around and are likely to go after the dog, and maybe you.

If you're in a pen with a cow and her calf, always have a quick route out of the pen, and don't allow yourself to be trapped in a corner. Cows that start acting very excited when licking their calf are prime suspects for attacking.

Beef animals, depending on the breed, tend to be even more protective in pastures, so be extra cautious when approaching a young beef calf.

Don't trust that bull

Bulls are by far the most dangerous and worst to work with. They are not to be trusted under any circumstance. They are big, aggressive and extremely quick for their size.

Bulls tend to be very territorial and want to protect their herd. They often exhibit some specific signs before charging, such as showing a side profile, pawing and excessive bellowing. When you see a bull do any of these, it is a good time to make a retreat.

Remember, bulls weigh about a ton and can move a lot faster than you, with the power of a small locomotive. I have talked to a couple of people who have been attacked by bulls, and they all comment on how fast it happened and how helpless they felt.

Most injuries from dealing with animals can be prevented by just paying attention to your surroundings and the signs that the animals are exhibiting. If they seem agitated or nervous, back away and let things calm down.

Remember that animals will respond differently to a stranger, so always be alert no matter what the owner claims.

Monty Belmer, DVM, is a veterinarian with the Waupun Vet Service in Waupun.

To Ask the Vet

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