



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



LOW-STRESS LIVESTOCK HANDLING SCHOOLS

Improving handler
safety and animal
quality

BY THE NUMBERS

- 5,000 acres impacted by WSU research and Extension programs that enhanced productivity, efficiency, or sustainability of crop production enterprises.
- 800,000 head of cattle impacted by WSU research and Extension programs that enhanced productivity, efficiency, or sustainability of livestock and dairy production enterprises.
- 1 peer-reviewed publication.
- 2 peer-reviewed scholarly products published.
- 4 seminars, workshops, demonstrations, field days, and educational events conducted annually that focus on agricultural profitability and food security.

2014

ISSUE

Nearly 1.1 million cattle are raised, fed, or harvested in the state of Washington each year. The state's beef industry is diverse, and includes cow and calf producers, stocker operations, feeders, packers, niche marketers, dairy beef producers, and youth beef producers.

The National Safety Council ranks cattle farms second among all farming enterprises in the number of injuries per hour of work. Individuals are seriously injured and even killed while handling cattle, and there is a large number of minor incidents, near misses, and serious accidents to producers and family members that go unreported.

Area cattle producers and feeders identified low-stress cattle handling education of vital importance to improve animal performance and promote handler safety and morale. Low-stress cattle handling not only improves caregiver safety, morale, and retention, but also is proven to improve animal performance, safety, health, and meat quality, as well as the perception of the cattle industry. Participants and cattle managers reported that it is difficult to put an economic value on the impact of low-stress cattle handling because of the many variables associated with cattle production, but say that it is worth investing in educational trainings because of the many positive impacts it has on handlers and animal performance.

RESPONSE

WSU Extension developed and organized a series of four low-stress cattle handling seminars for cattle handlers from the ranch to the packing plant. In addition to the seminars, a 25-minute video was developed from the trainings to provide follow-up education after the seminars. The producers, managers, employees, and family members present for the Low-Stress Cattle Handling Workshops represented more than 800,000 cattle raised annually. Participants learned how low-stress handling techniques can improve safety, morale, and retention in the workforce, and health, performance, and meat quality in the livestock.

Two major feeding operations (representing more than 110,000 head raised annually) have organized in-house trainings and facility reviews by Dr. Tom Noffsinger, DVM, who made three trips to the operations.

The project was funded by the Western Center for Risk Management Education in collaboration with the Grant County Cattlemen, Washington Cattle Feeders Association, and Washington Cattlemen's Association.



QUOTES

“The veterinarian (Dr. Tom Noffsinger) showed us that by handling the cattle better, they take to the vaccinations better and are less likely to get sick. This cuts down on needing to give antibiotics just by handling them better. We tried this method on 45 replacement heifers, and for the first time had no sick cattle ... Learning a better way to handle the cattle now has a ripple effect through the whole operation.” - Aaron Raap, Aaron Raap Farm, Ephrata, Washington

“The most beneficial part of the program was creating a positive environment for both livestock and employees. We want the public to know that we are proud of what we do and how we do it. We have the comfort of our livestock in the front of our minds every day ... As for our employees, our company is only as good as the people we have working for us. So, it is our top priority that they are safe and well trained ... The low-stress program helps to instill the pride and attention to detail that makes all of us feel worthwhile at the end of each day.” - Scott English, English Hay, Mesa, Washington

Dr. Noffsinger, a world-renowned authority on cattle care and handling, served as the primary instructor. Seminars were conducted for the cattle feeding industry and youth beef producers in August 2012, and for cow and calf producers and stockers in January 2013.

IMPACTS

One hundred percent of surveyed participants reported that the seminars were a good investment of their time and resources. Managers and owners of all attending feeding operations and packing plants reported improved employee morale and implementation of low-stress cattle handling techniques by employees.

In a formal follow-up survey of the two seminars focusing on cow and calf producers and stocker operations, 100% of respondents, representing 47.1% of cattle produced, (approximately 88,612 head) reported that they had implemented low-stress cattle handling techniques. From this implementation:

- 84% reported no serious human injuries in the last 12 months;
- 61.5% reported their stress level decreased when working cattle;
- 75% reported improved family and employee morale; and
- 84.6% reported improved animal performance, health, and no animal injury/death loss with association to handling.

The individuals who responded with an economic impact value said it ranged from \$30 to \$50 per head annually, suggesting that implementation of low-stress handling techniques could have a total economic impact of \$24 million to \$40 million per year on the Washington cattle industry. The program review video has been distributed to more than 100 cattle ranches and feeding facilities, and has been viewed by 500 unique computer users since its posting in January 2014. A Low-Stress Cattle Handling video is available for viewing at <http://vimeo.com/83256777>, and has been rated of high value for supplemental and follow-up training in an online survey. The video has been translated into Spanish and is available at <https://vimeo.com/118762317>.

In 2014, we secured additional Risk Management Education funding to offer 4 low-stress cattle handling, stockmanship, and horsemanship seminars in 2015.