



Natural Stockmanship

by **Meghan Soderstrom**

***Low-stress
handling on foot
increases
profitability.***

DENVER, CO (Feb. 1, 2006) — Common methods of cattle handling — using fear and force — stress animals out of their natural state, which decreases their ability to turn a profit, career stockman Joel Ham said Feb. 1 at the 13th Cattlemen's College. Using low-stress handling techniques, stockmen can understand their cattle's natural tendencies and work within those boundaries.

Ham explained that cattle have two types of instinctive behavior — behavior based on their desire to survive and behavior based on their desire to maintain a distance from us. Ham's handling techniques leave the survival instinct dormant and allow him to gradually reduce the animal's "flight zone" by applying and quickly removing pressure to gain the animal's trust.

Ham emphasized that it is not the animal's fault when things aren't going right; everything they do is in reaction to the stockman's actions. Cattlemen must take responsibility for the results they get and ask themselves, "What am I doing to cause those animals to do that?" Each action must be in preparation for what is going to come next, he said.

Most people have

misconceptions about cattle based on their experiences. Ham said some of these misconceptions include: cattle don't like to go through gates, into corrals or chutes, or onto trucks; cattle will walk the fence when put in a new pasture; freshly weaned calves will get sick after trucking long distances; and the older cows get, the harder they are to handle. Ham said that most cattlemen don't consider themselves the cause of these behaviors, but in most cases they are responsible.

To handle cattle effectively, stockmen must understand cattle's natural tendencies. Ham described seven of these tendencies:

- They like to see you.
- They like to follow other animals.
- They like to go the direction their head is facing.
- They don't like to be pressured from behind.
- They like to feel like what they are doing is their choice.
- They like to go around you rather than have you go around them.
- They prefer you move in straight lines rather than arcs.

"Work within these boundaries and the animals will stay in their

natural state and will have a tendency to calmly move away from you. Thus, they go where you want them to go.

If you violate these natural tendencies, then the survival instinct will come out,” Ham said. “When animals feel like they need to survive is when we lose control.”

Ham said a common mistake is to pressure cattle from behind. “This just causes them to turn around and look at you. Then you have their head going the wrong

direction and you have to turn them around again before asking them to move,” he said. “You can be behind them, just don’t apply pressure from behind.”

Cattle should only be asked to do one thing at a time, he advised. First, ask cattle to face in the direction you desire them to move. Once they are all facing the right way, you can pressure them to move as long as you release the pressure as soon as you get results.



Editor's Note: This article was written under contract or by staff of Angus Productions Inc. (API), which claims copyright to this material. It may not be published or distributed without the express permission of Angus Productions Inc. (API). To request reprint permission and guidelines, contact Shauna Rose Hermel, editor, at (816) 383-5270 or shermel@angusjournal.com.