



Animal welfare on the news – Ensure proper cow handling techniques at your dairy

Animal welfare has been on the news for last few months. And proper animal handling is an important aspect of a good animal welfare program.

As a manager never assume that the people you hire know how to handle cows properly. Having experience working at other farms doesn't mean that they will know how to handle cows. In fact, cow handling is an area that I always cover during milking trainings and orientation programs in many dairies around the country.

From my experience, lack of cow handling skills is more often than not a big challenge with new employees in many dairies. I always talk about this with many employees at different dairies and often they confess being scared of cows, reason why they are so aggressive when pushing cows to the parlor. Others tell me that they've worked with beef cattle at home, which is easy to tell when you hear them whistling, screaming, and sometimes even hitting cows thinking that they must herd dairy cows like wild cowboys would do out in a beef ranch. The reality is that not many people know much about cow's behavior when they first arrive at a dairy.

Here are a few suggestions you should consider to ensure you have "good cow people" at your dairy:

- Work on your interviewing and hiring process to ensure that you ask the right questions and that you evaluate people's "animal handling abilities and knowledge" before hiring someone at your dairy. Dairy managers should take the selection and hiring process more seriously and should ALWAYS check for references before hiring someone.
- Cow handling techniques should be part of every training / orientation program for new employees. Emphasis should be put on this topic including clear consequences of not following good cow practices. EVERYONE MUST go through this training, independently of how much experience they have.

Why is this so important? Because you, as a dairy manager, have the obligation to ensure that your cows are being handled properly, for the benefit of the cows, your employees benefit (avoid or reduce risk of injuries working around cows), and for

your own benefit (calm cows are healthier and make more milk than stressed cows).

If you are interested in learning more about cow handling training please contact me @ felix@apndairy.com.

