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Cattle Working Facilities

When you sell livestock via private treaty, your cattle facilities are indirectly exposed to lots of folks. I'm in an enviable position to very often receive compliments towards the facilities on my family's operation. Having a brother who is extremely handy with a welder and fencing building is a huge plus! It hasn't always been that way, and it has taken a capital investment to make facility improvements. With cattle prices where they are today, now is a good time to look at investing into cattle handling facilities.

Weaning time is one point in the year when working facilities get a workout and when thinking about either improving the existing facilities or building something new comes to the forefront. Cattle handling can be time consuming, physically demanding and potentially dangerous in unfavorable situations. Because of this it is important that corrals and facilities are constructed to confine cattle safely and efficiently for close observation and to perform routine health and management procedures. Not all cattle operations are the same and needs in a feedyard don't exactly match those for a cow/calf operation. Designing cattle working facilities with detailed planning is important to ensure that the facilities meet these needs as well as providing for efficient future expansion. Reducing animal stress, making the most efficient use of labor and minimizing the risk of injury to both humans and cattle is the goal of a well designed and built cattle handling facility.

The basic components of cattle working facility include holding/sorting pens and alley, crowding area – most commonly sweep tub or Bud Box, working chute with alleyway and a loadout. The holding/sorting pens serve as the initial catch pens for cattle. Cattle are then sorted and processed into a crowding area for purpose of sending through an alleyway leading to a loadout chute or squeeze chute and head catch. The squeeze chute is where health and management procedures are administered.

Understanding basic behavior principles results in good corral designs which take advantage of cattle's natural instincts. When cattle behavior is considered in designing a working system, it results in improved corral and working facility plans. Fight or flight mentality generally wires cattle to "flight" where they return to basic herd mentality. Cattle want to see the handler, go around you, be with other cattle and return to where they have been. Utilizing these instincts and knowing that the greatest desire of the cattle is to get out of the facility, can help with design.

If you are in a situation to design and position a new set of working facilities, the first consideration is location. Corrals should be easily accessible by trucks and trailers under all types of weather conditions. They need to be accessible to major pastures or paddocks for easy movement of cattle into the facilities. Working facilities should be placed along a central fence line in an area where several fence lines and/or pastures come together. Drainage is another important consideration when selecting a site for working facilities. The site should be well drained to avoid mud and sanitation problems caused by standing water. Avoid sites that are directly adjacent to neighboring residences, where dust, flies, noise, and odor might be an issue in being a good neighbor.

Properly designed cattle working facilities are a long-term investment that should be thoroughly considered and planned before construction. No system is ever completely perfect and even in the best thought-out plans, there will be things that could be modified after cattle are run through them. However, proper planning can pay dividends in terms of benefits to both cattle and handlers. Kansas State University has a couple of good resources found in [Designing a Bud Box for Cattle Handling - MF3349](#) and [Planning and Designing Cattle Feedlots MF2316](#) to help in design.