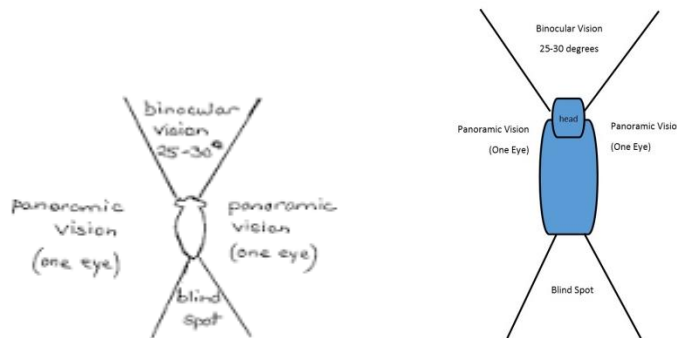


Gently is the Deal when Handling Veal

By Nancy Noecker, Beef Cow Calf Specialist, OMAFRA

Remember, cattle are bovines and, as such, see and perceive the world very differently than you. Their vision is panoramic—which means their field of vision is almost 360 degrees—with a small blind spot directly behind them and directly in front of them. If you are standing where you can see the animal's eye, it is aware of you. Despite this wide range of vision, they have very poor depth perception. Hence the hesitation and head bobbing at every shadow, change in flooring, or movement to the side, as you try to “drive” the cattle forward through an alley to their pens. The head bobbing is trying to move whatever they are looking at into that region of “binocular” vision (the only area they see clearly in). That wide panoramic vision area is big—but fuzzy. So, the cattle may have more of a startled reaction.

Walk down your alley prior to trying to move the cattle and remove all distractions and look for shadows (eliminate them if possible). Also try to make sure the floor surface is all the same—and not slippery! Think of yourself on ice—once you slip you become much slower, careful, and halting about your movements.



Cattle hear at much higher frequencies than we do. So fan noises that we may ignore may not only annoy, but stop the cattle moving forward. Yelling will also be counterproductive when moving calves. Work by Dr. Joe Stookey in Saskatoon found that cattle found yelling as aversive as being restrained in a chute. If we think about it, by the time we are yelling the voice often has a menacing tone to it.

So how do you move cattle without it taking all day? All animals will tend to move away from anything BIG and solid... so look at pig-boards or make your own equivalent from plywood. You can often sort of push the calves along. If possible, allow a lot of extra time. Keep your voice down. Choose the staff with the most patience to work with the intakes, and if you are getting frustrated—WALK AWAY (We talk of it taking 20 minutes plus for cattle to calm—once they are worked up—I BELIEVE IT MAY TAKE EVEN LONGER FOR THE HANDLER TO CALM DOWN). Always remember how your customers would feel if they saw you hitting an animal. Pretend someone is sitting on the fence with their cell phone out or better yet, get someone to actually do that—then review the video and self-assess. For some cattle moving longer distances—a wheeled cart may save a lot of frustration! Also continue looking for new information in places like <http://www.grandin.com/>, Veal Farmers of Ontario, and Farm and Food Care.