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# Handling Animals Safely and Without Stress

Since the domestication of the cow, farmers have had to handle their animals on a regular basis. Over the course of one lactation, a producer can handle his cows 10 to 15 times during the lactation and this is without counting the handling for milking. Therefore moving animals is virtually a daily activity.

The Code of Practice states that: Workers who handle cattle have to be familiar with their behaviour and with gentle handling techniques, either due to training, experience or apprenticeship. It is also a requirement of proAction®.

The purpose of this requirement is, of course, to reduce stress on animals, but it also reduces the risk of injury to animals and farmers while improving work efficiency.

To properly match our handling of the animal with its behaviour, it is important to properly understand how it communicates and reacts with its environment.

### HANDLING 101

Every animal has an invisible zone around it, which is called a flight zone. When we enter this zone (A), the animal will want to protect this distance between him and his "predator" by moving away. Outside of the flight zone there is the pressure zone (B) in which a handler can position himself to initiate movement of an animal without scaring it away. When movement is initiated, pressure must be immediately released to reward the animal. That way the learning process will go smoothly. The tamer the animal is, the smaller the circumference of this zone.

The handler must position himself on the side of the animal, making sure to clearly see the eye of the animal. He has to make sure he gets the animal's attention. This can be detected by observing the movement of the ears. Without looking at us, a cow pointing her ear towards us is often a sign that we have captured the animal's attention.

It must be recognized that the cow has difficulty judging the distance of its handler due to her monocular side vision.
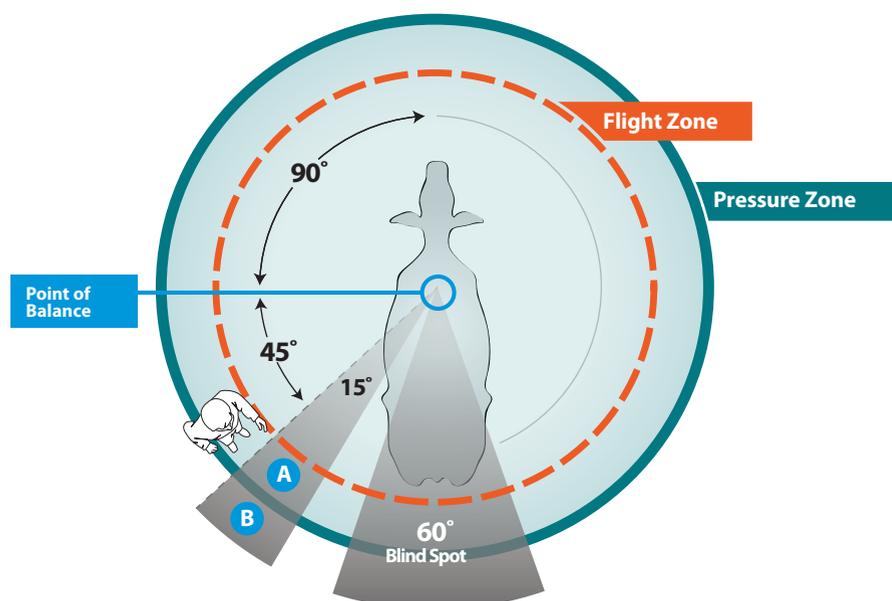
She has about a 60-degree angle blind spot behind her. Do not position yourself directly behind an animal to make it move forward because it will tend to turn its head to try to see us and this will also affect its trajectory.

When we walk faster than the animal, it tends to slow down and stop the moment we go past its shoulder (point of balance). Using this technique, we can control the speed and even make the animal stop solely with the position of our body. Walking in the opposite direction of animals will tend to make them speed up.
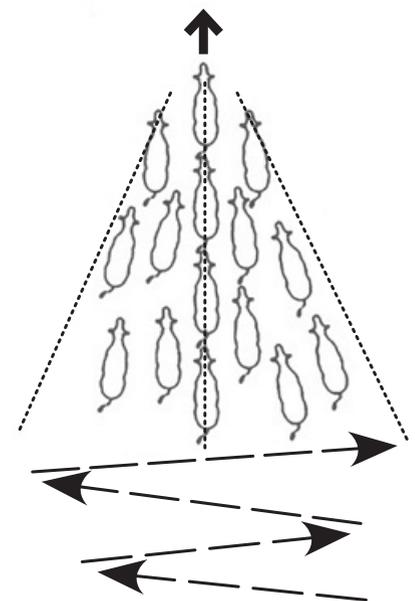
### GETTING AN ANIMAL OUT OF A STALL

Using the point of balance technique to get the animal out of its stall is very effective. Simply enter a stall next to the cow, advance to go past the point of balance (the shoulder) while putting pressure towards the flight zone. That way the animal will rise and calmly walk out of the stall.

## THE ZIGZAG TECHNIQUE

The zigzag technique is used to bring a group of animals from point A to point B. This is useful both in the barn and outdoors. The idea is to start moving from left to right to gather the group of animals. Once the movement of the group is initiated and the animals are aligned in the direction we want to move them, just make a path of straight lines from left to right. Circulating from left to right allows us to capture the attention of all of the animals. Regardless of the number of animals in the group, this is an applicable technique.



*Grandin, 2014 (https://www.grandin. com/behaviour/principles/eight. steps.grazing.without.fences.html)*

## CONCLUSION

Animal handling is mainly a matter of positioning. Yelling is not necessary; it can all be done with both hands in your pockets. We must remember that a way to do things quickly is to take your time and not force animals to rush their movements. The more we use these techniques on young animals, the easier it will be once they become adults.

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