

Farm Animal Safety

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Now that schools are out for summer, you may potentially have youth that are working for you during the summer months. Also, a majority of the general public has not been raised around an agricultural setting, so these individuals may not be familiar with animal behavior. Most of you have animals that are responsible for your income. However, animals are the second most likely cause of injury on the farm after farm machinery accidents. Following a few simple rules should allow young people and ourselves to safely work around and enjoy farm animals.

Farm Animal Behavior

Large farm animals are prey, so they behave based on their instincts. They have survived by reacting quickly to situations that may threaten them. Their eyes are on the sides of their head and they can see most of the way around themselves. However, they do have a blind spot directly behind themselves and while their vision is good at detecting movement, it is not good at identifying the details of what is moving and whether or not the movement actually represents a threat. Farm animals are also not very good at determining how far away things are. Farm animals have a good sense of hearing but often cannot determine whether an unfamiliar sound is a threat or not. Farm animals react to sudden unfamiliar sights or noises by moving quickly away or by trying to protect themselves by kicking, butting or biting. The animals most likely to cause injury are intact males, such as bulls, who are naturally aggressive, or dams with new babies who are naturally protective. Sick animals and animals separated from their group may be naturally defensive. Wild animals may not behave the way we expect if they feel trapped or threatened. Any animal as big as some of these animals are may accidentally cause injury. Finally, some individual animals may be more aggressive than others. Anyone, especially youth, which are not familiar with farm animal behavior should never be allowed around these animals except in the company of someone that is accustomed to the behavior of such animals.

Tips to Prevent Injury

- Dress properly around farm animals with sturdy shoes, long pants and leather gloves if needed. Never open toed shoes
- Never approach an unfamiliar animal alone
- When approaching farm animals, always have an escape plan in mind
- Make sure the animals can see and hear your approach. Speak calmly and approach slowly
- Always watch your footing
- Approach dams with newborns carefully

- Be aware of the animals' body language and back away from a threatening animal
- Equipment such as halters and corrals should be maintained in good condition
- Avoid dramatic changes to an animal's everyday routine

Zoonotic Diseases

Zoonotic diseases are those that can be spread from animals to humans. Some of these diseases are mild and some are deadly. Examples of zoonotic diseases include Ringworm, Soremouth from sheep, diarrheal diseases such as Cryptosporidium, Salmonella, E coli, Giardiasis, and the neurologic disease Rabies.

Some tips for preventing the spread of disease from animals to humans include:

- Young people should not have contact with sick animals and should avoid unfamiliar ones
- Always wear gloves when handling sick animals and wash your hands after touching animals
- To prevent the spread of disease, always handle sick animals last and don't return to the well animals unless hands/boots have been washed and a change of clothes
- Keep only healthy, properly vaccinated animals on the farm
- Isolate sick animals from other animals to prevent disease spread
- Isolate all new animals on the farm for at least 14 days to prevent the introduction of new diseases to the herd and the family.

Summer time can be an opportunity for youth to learn new experiences when proper protection measures are in place. If you have any questions concerning education for anyone unfamiliar with animal behavior, please contact your local veterinarian, Extension agent, or myself, lstrick5@utk.edu, or 865-974-3538.