

# Cattle Work, Prep Reaches Its Peak In Autumn



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**A**utumn is a time when work with beef cattle reaches a peak in Missouri according to Eldon Cole, livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension. "During this time of year calves will be weaned and

processed through working facilities and their mothers will likely be put through the chute for their health treatments," said Cole.

Before this fall season work occurs, Cole reminds farmers to check their corral to see if it is ready to receive cattle. "There's nothing much worse than to have the family, neighbors, the coffee shop crew and the veterinarian arrive to work cattle and you find major problems that should have been repaired long ago."

Weak or broken boards, gates that won't swing or need a shot of WD-40, weeds higher than the fence are just a few of the problems that might be encountered. While making those repairs, think about other features that could be corrected to make the cattle working less traumatic on the cattle and the workers.

One of the often seen roadblocks to smooth cattle handling is the open spaces in the alley fence that leads up to the working chute. The openness causes the calves and cows to try and turn around rather than moving forward. "This can be helped by closing in the gaps between the pipe fencing either with plywood or old carpet hung over the fence," said Cole.

A frequent problem in working cattle through

the chute is putting too many cattle in the tub or holding area at the beginning of the alley. Give them enough space in the crowding pen to turn around and get their heads on the right end. If the crowd pen will hold eight head, cattle will flow better if you only put four or five in at a time.

Another tip to make cattle working a happier experience is to refrain as much as possible from using electric-cattle prods. Instead, use a store-bought plastic paddle, a broom or put a flag of some kind on a sorting pole or old whip. "Working cattle quietly and gently should be the goal of each roundup," said Cole. Research shows that excited cattle perform poorer in the feedlot and that excitability can affect the carcass and eating quality of the beef.

"It may even be helpful to score your cattle for temperament as you work them," said Cole. Culling the hard-to-handle cattle can help according to Cole. Temperament is affected by genetics, but more importantly, the way they are managed has a greater influence on the way they act.

Cole says that cattle working can go smoothly and not cause a breakup in the family, but it does take some effort. "If you really want to analyze what's right and what's wrong with your corral and your cattle working technique, have someone videotape the whole process. Sit down and review the tape and you'll be surprised, maybe even embarrassed at what took place," said Cole. Δ

*Eldon Cole is Livestock Specialist, with the University of Missouri Extension at Lawrence County.*