



# Spend Time Training Cattle

*Livestock specialist offers tips for smooth cattle handling.*

by **KINDRA GORDON**, field editor

Professor and Texas AgriLife Extension livestock specialist Ron Gill demonstrated how moving a group of a dozen yearling heifers down an alley and through a chute can be done calmly and quietly when low-stress cattle-handling principles are utilized. Gill worked with the group of heifers by himself — while also explaining his movement and methods to the audience. In 45 minutes, he walked the heifers through the chute and alley three times — without ever raising his voice.

Gill emphasized that low-stress cattle

handling is about putting pressure on — or taking it off — a group of animals to get them to move. Pressure is applied by moving toward or away from the front half of an animal's body.

"I deal with the eye and the ear of the animal. Once their head responds to me, all of my communication is with the front 4 inches of their head — the rest of the animal's body will follow," Gill shared.

His preference is to work from the side or front of a group of cattle. He explains that when you stand behind the group, they simply start to circle.

"Don't go behind cattle to empty a pen. You want to draw them to you, and release

them. Find that balance point [at the front of the animal or group of animals] and move in to stop them and move out to release them to go forward. Start training them this way," he advised.

"The more you work with your cattle, the easier it is to get them to move where you want them to," Gill added. "If you have a good set of replacement heifers, spend time training them."

"The first time through the chute, you want them to just flow through," he shared, and demonstrated leaving the front head catch open and just letting heifers calmly walk through the system. "If we can get heifers through the chute quiet

and calm, it shouldn't be a big deal to go back."

Specifically, Gill suggested acclimating animals to go through the alley and chute a few times prior to the actual processing or breeding day. He shared that some research has shown a 10% boost to pregnancy rates among heifers that were handled with low-stress methods and were acclimated to the chute.

## More tips

Gill shared additional low-stress cattle-handling pointers during his demonstration.



**Above:** Low-stress cattle handling is about putting pressure on or taking it off of animals to get them to move.

**Left:** Gill says once an animal's head responds to him, all of his communication is with the front 4 inches of their head. The rest of the animal's body will follow.

**Right:** The more you work with your cattle, the easier it is to get them to move where you want them to. It makes sense to take time to train them.





If you get in a pickle at home working cattle, Gill recommends stopping and making it more simple.

**“If you want something entertaining, film yourself working cattle sometime.”**

— Ron Gill

figure it out, if you stop putting pressure on them in the wrong place. Give them time to think their way through it.”

Additionally, he advised, “If you want something entertaining, film yourself working cattle sometime.”

Lastly, Gill sent audience members home with this advice, “Hopefully, this demonstration gives you pause next time you are working with cattle. When you

go home and get in a pickle sometime, ask yourself, ‘What would Gill say?’ Don’t make it complicated.”



**Editor’s Note:** Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlemaster from Whitewood, S.D. This article is part of Angus Media’s coverage of the 2017 Angus Convention available online at [www.angus.org/Media/News/AngusConvention.aspx](http://www.angus.org/Media/News/AngusConvention.aspx).



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- Get all animals facing the same direction, or it will be more difficult to move the group where you want them.
- If animals are queued up in an alley and are not moving forward into the chute, try walking from the front of the alley, down along the side toward the last animal in the queue — Gill demonstrated that they will then move forward.
- Gill said having a solid side on one side of the alley system can be beneficial because it may prevent animals in the alley from seeing cattle or people moving the opposite direction. That said, he does not advocate solid sides on everything, and expressed, “We’ve gotten way too enamored with solid sides.”
- Regarding sweep tubs, Gill explained for smaller systems he prefers a 135° sweep, which better mimics the large 270° sweeps. Both systems bring cattle just a little past the alley and then point them to the way out through the alley. He’s found the 90° or 180° sweep allows too much room for cattle to start a circling motion instead of finding the alley.
- Gill also commented that for gentle cattle the sweep tub works well, for cattle that are more high-strung, he prefers to use a Bud Box.
- Another rule he emphasizes — don’t put more stock in the sweep tub than will fit in the lead-up alley to the chute.

In his closing remarks, Gill noted, “When cattle don’t cooperate, it’s not their fault. It’s our fault. Look at yourself [your actions] and do something different. If we ask them right, it’s easier to get them through a system.”

He added, “Normally cows will