



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
EXTENSION

MSU DAWG TRACKS

Way back in the 1800s, our university was founded on a need for training in agriculture. And that still holds true today with the many animals throughout our units serving as a visual reminder. Whether you directly handle livestock daily or are just near them in passing, it is important to recognize hazardous situations and understand animals' traits so you can stay safe.

Most animals do not see and hear like we do.

Therefore, it is important to avoid spooking them. A lot of livestock animals' natural instinct is "flight", or move away, when scared. This is what often causes the most injuries to people by being knocked down, stepped on, or caught between an animal and a stationary object. Other animals are more prone to "fight" when scared. People may be bit, kicked, head-butted, or pinned against a hard surface.

- Avoid quick movements.
- Avoid loud noises & recognize that something not so loud to us could be very loud to an animal.
- Approach animals slowly, calmly and within their view.

Respect animals' size and body mass.

Larger animals such as cow & horses can weigh several hundred pounds when newborn, up to thousands when grown. A person is at a grave disadvantage because of weight alone if it decides to move, jump, or slips and falls on you. But don't forget that shorter animals, such as sheep and pigs, can also use their body mass. Being low to the ground, they can easily knock you off your feet.

Speaking of feet, wear proper footwear. An animal's weight is concentrated to a relatively small footprint which could cause a broken toe or foot to you if stepped on.

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When a couple of our experienced animal handlers at MSU were asked what they thought was important for others to know about their animals...

Ashley Glenn, Foundation Herds supervisor – *"Read a horse's signals. You can tell a lot about IF and WHEN a horse may react to something by reading its body language. If you stay alert & aware of what they are doing, you can determine how to react in a situation."*

What specific body language in a horse says, get away from me? *"Pinning ears and turning their behind end towards you."*

William White, Foundation Herds facilities coordinator, on sheep - *"You have to watch the males when in a pen; they really do like to RAM. The females you have to watch when feeding, with all their wool, they stick together like Velcro."*

On pigs – *"They are very observant but can't see far. Any changes on the floor, markings or texture, bothers pigs. Using a board, to act like a wall, helps when moving them. Pigs like to find an escape hole."*

General rules for working around animals:

- Never prod an animal when it has nowhere to go. Touch animals gently rather than shoving or bumping them.
- When working around male animals be that much more cautious, as they are more aggressive by nature.
- Be careful around newborn and young animals. Be aware of a strong maternal instinct.
- Always have an escape route when working in close quarters and avoid working alone.

All groups of animals do not act the same. Their differences can be because of genetics, how they were raised, and if in a stock or production type setting. This is why it's most important to be observant and recognize the hazards in all situations.

Sources:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/USAgCenters>

<https://www.agriculture.com/livestock>

<https://www.tdi.texas.gov/pubs/videoresource/stpsafelivest.pdf>