



Farm Vet News

Endell Farm Vets Blog

Endell Vets Beef Team

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Safe Handling For TB Testing

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFE TB TESTING

The Staff: everyone helping with TB testing should be familiar with cattle and work as a team to perform the test safely. To run the test quickly and effectively, enough people should be present and each individual's particular task should be clear prior to the start of the test. It should be clear who is responsible for moving animals; opening and closing gates; manoeuvring the head yoke; and assisting with recording ear tag numbers and skin measurements. Once the test has started it requires full effort and concentration. Attempting to carry out multiple tasks at once will decrease the attention being paid and therefore may increase the risk of accidents as well as create possible delays.

The Facilities: these include the crush, the race, and the collecting yards. The crush must be properly secured to the ground and have a head yoke (ideally double and self-locking) able to restrain the animal while leaving enough space for the veterinary surgeon to access the animal's neck. Moreover, a metallic bar/chain or rump rail will prevent the animal shifting back and forth. A safe race must be properly secured to the ground and animals should be able to enter smoothly. A funnel end, a slip-resistant floor, and a clear end where animals are able to see beyond the crush will help to achieve the goal of a safe and effective TB test. Calmly loading animals from their pens into the collecting yard is a critical point. Circular yards made of steel with a firm and clean surface where people and animals move freely are the safest.

The Animals: TB testing is certainly a stressful time for cattle and over-excited cattle are always a safety hazard. However, a calm, quiet demeanour may decrease their stress. Cattle remember and learn from previous bad experiences. If you treat animals kindly it will pay off in the future



Figure 1: Causes of fatal injuries on UK farms during 2018-2019. Source RIDDOR.

INTRODUCTION

Year after year, serious injuries occur on farms while handling cattle. Often these incidents are a consequence of using ineffective methods or inadequate equipment. We must be aware that work with cattle is always associated with a risk of injury from crushing, kicking, butting or goring. Therefore, when moving cattle, great care must be taken and we must never underestimate the strength, speed, or behaviour of any animal – regardless of their size.

According to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) agriculture remains among the riskiest industry sectors. During the last five years, 39 people were killed when injured by cattle in the UK.

When TB testing the whole herd needs to be handled and consequently the risk of accidents is undoubtedly increased. Tuberculosis is a very serious diseases for all mammals including humans and your veterinary surgeon wants to help you prevent the disease from entering and/or help you eradicate it from your herd. To achieve this, the test must be carried out accurately. On Day 1 the veterinary surgeon must check the skin on the neck; clip the hair; measure the skin; and inject the tuberculin. Then they must touch every animal and measure any lumps present on Day 2. The better the animals are restrained, the better the accuracy of the test. Effective restraint also allows for faster, more efficient testing thereby minimises disruptions to the normal working of your farm.

What Calms Cattle Down?	What upsets cattle?
- Working with them in a quiet and confident way	- Being chased, hit or beaten
- Silence and low sounds	- Loud noises (dogs barking or people shouting)
- Gentle and rhythmic sounds	- Machinery working
- Stroking	- Hunger and thirst
	- Over-crowding
	- Rushed movement
	- Entering their 'flight zone'

How Can I Make My TB Test More Safe, Effective, and Accurate?

Keeping the crush and the race in a covered area will protect from rain. This will not only make TB testing more comfortable but will prevent corrosion of the crush and therefore extend the lifetime period as well as increase the security.

Makeshift gates and races connected with string may make handling more difficult. Sliding doors should be properly lubricated, not noisy and operated from the working side for safer and easier manipulation.

While in the yard having water troughs available, speaking in a calm voice, and using flags to move cattle will keep them calm. When using a bar as a slip rail behind the animal beware of the animal's weight which can make the bar jerk upwards or sideways as demonstrated in the diagram below.

Uneven or slippery floors will make cattle walk more hesitantly. A rubber mat or a slip-

resistant floor made of concrete encourages animals to move more smoothly.

Sheet races with high sides will prevent animals from jumping and will reduce visual disturbances. Combining a high-sided race with an adjacent walkway, access gaps for herdspeople and the use of sliding gates along the race will improve cattle flow and ease of handling.

The race and crush must be suitable for the size of the animal being restrained. Have you ever considered how much time and energy you expend trying to handle younger stock in a large crush? Investing in a second crush may prove profitable in the long term for your farm.

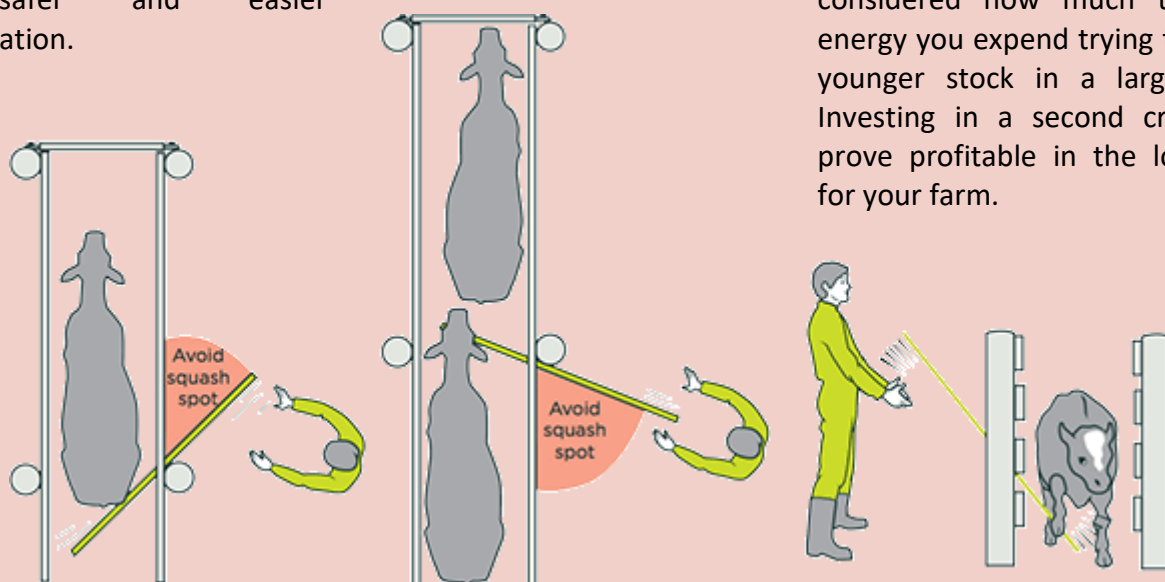


Figure 2: Dangers associated with swinging bars

SUMMARY

Despite the best efforts of farmers, farm-workers, and veterinary surgeons accidents still happen far too frequently while working with cattle. During TB testing the risk of injury is high, however, by making some small structural changes (which do not need to cost a lot of money) or by changing some habits, TB testing can be carried out in a safer manner. Effective loading and restraint of animals in the crush will make the test more efficient and minimise the amount of time and resources used.

Our staff have extensive experience with many different handling methods and facilities which allows us an overview of what works well and what doesn't. If you would like to implement improvement measures, or you would like to discuss anything else relating to the TB testing of your herd, please do not hesitate to contact any member of our team who will be more than happy to advise you further.