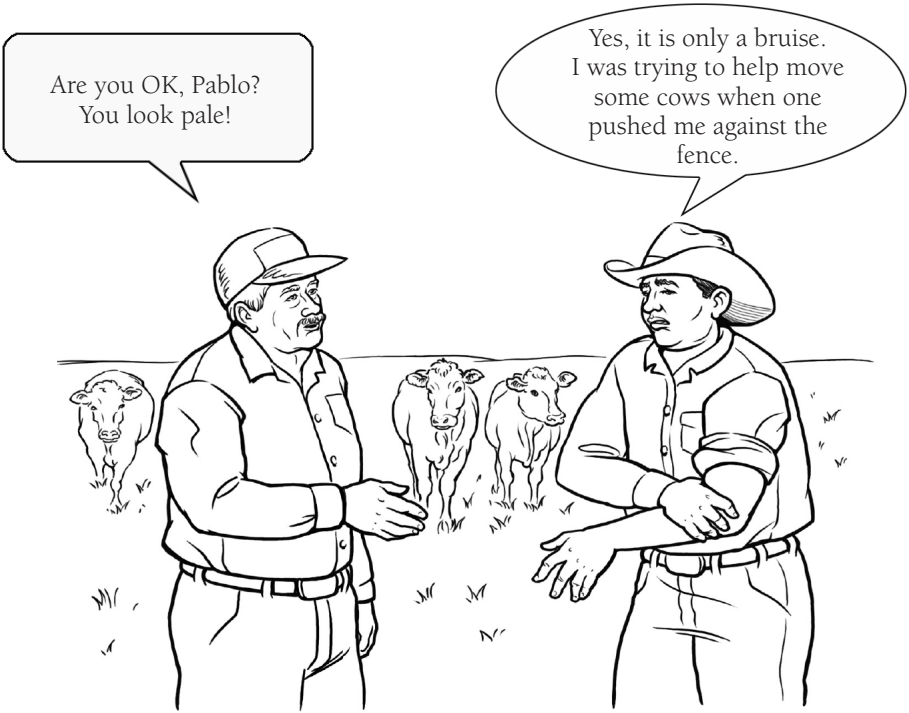
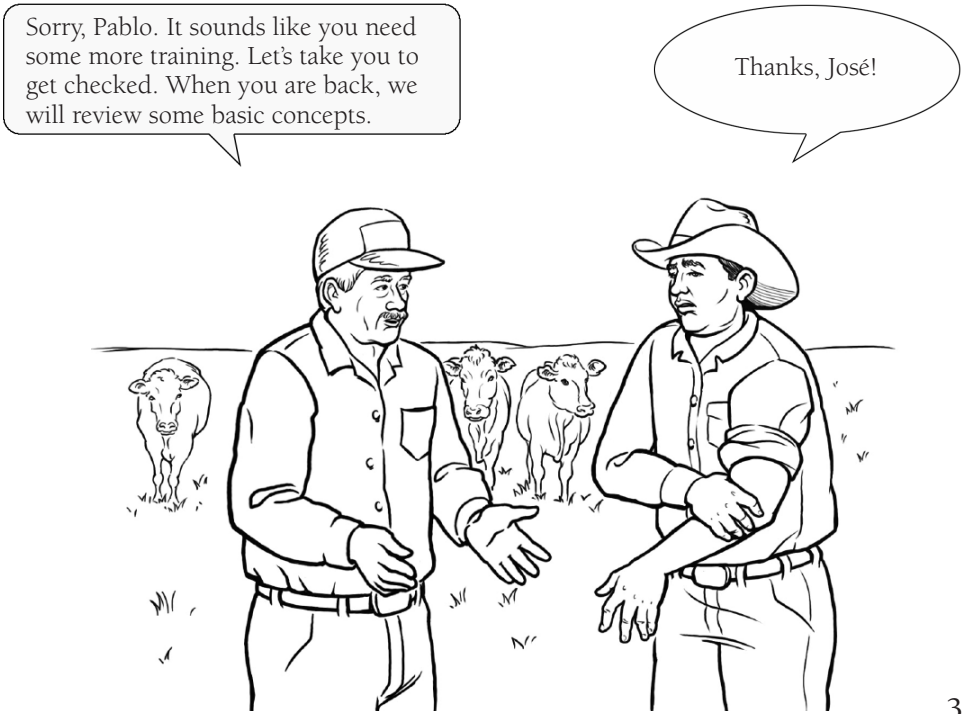
Pablo is a young man, and this is his first week working at a dairy.

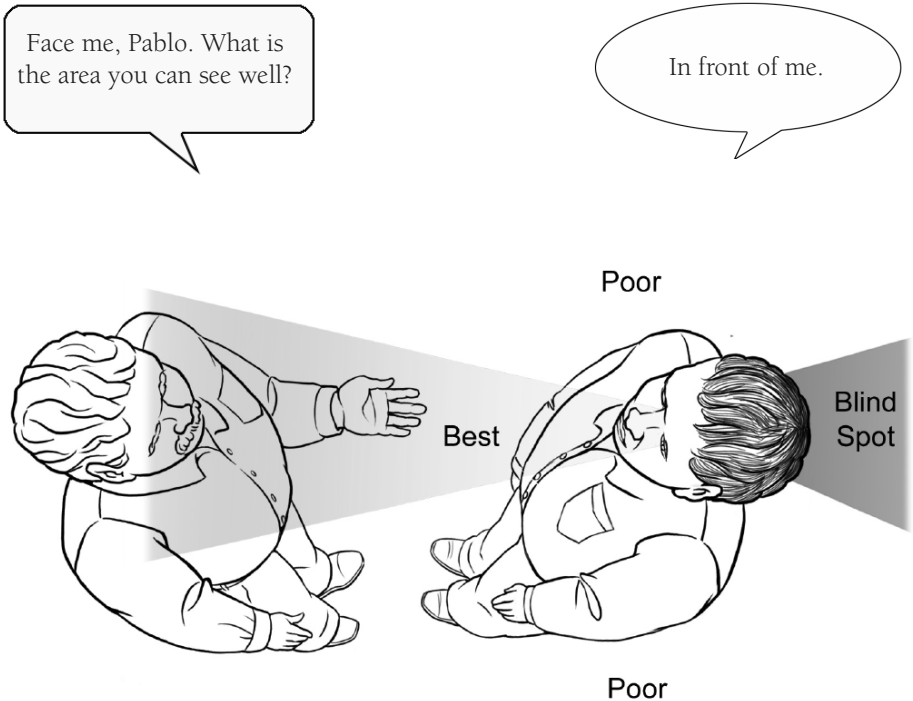
José is an experienced worker at the same dairy.


Are you OK, Pablo? You look pale!
Yes, it is only a bruise. I was trying to help move some cows when one pushed me against the fence.


Sorry, Pablo. It sounds like you need some more training. Let's take you to get checked. When you are back, we will review some basic concepts.
Thanks, José!

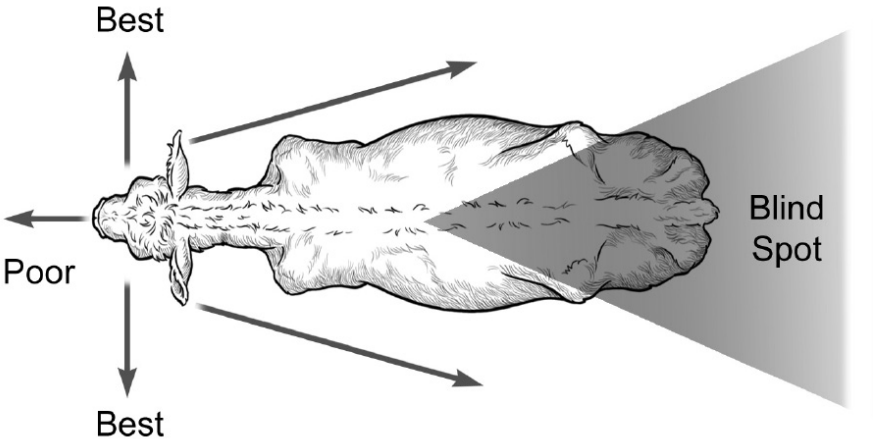
The following day. . .

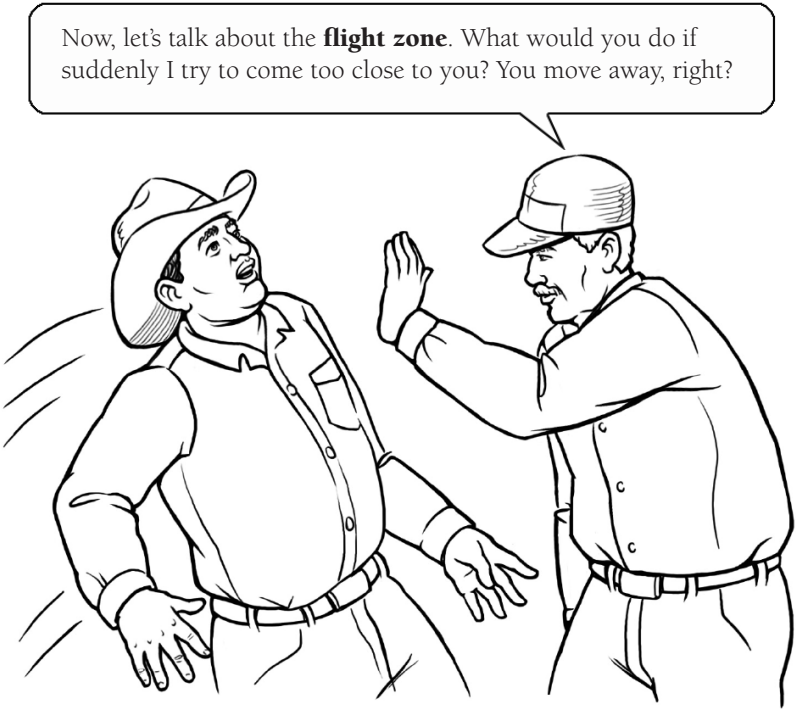
To work safely around cattle, you need to understand them. Let's talk about some important things: **(1) the blind spot; (2) the flight zone; (3) signs of stress;** and **(4) the point of balance.**


Face me, Pablo. What is the area you can see well?
In front of me.
Poor
Best
Blind Spot
Poor

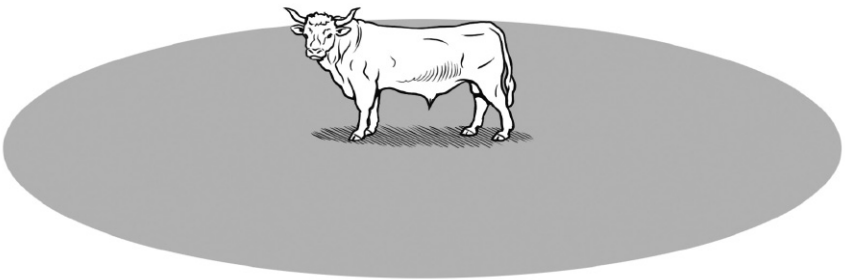
This is because your eyes are at the front of your face.
But take a look at the cow's head; its eyes are on the sides.

A cow can see well to its sides, but not very well to the front. Like you, a cow cannot see what is behind it; this area is called the **blind spot**. If you approach a cow from behind, it will not see what is coming; it only will hear the noise. A startled cow may kick you.

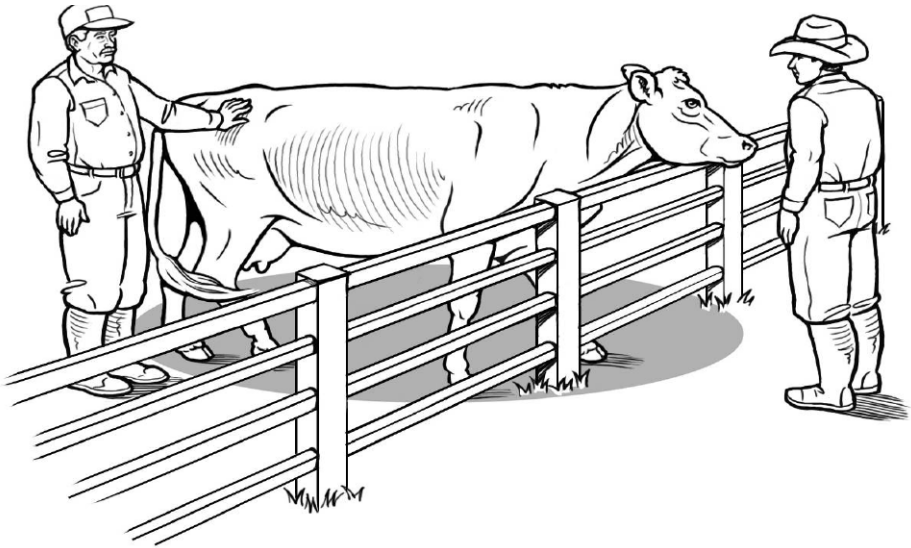



Now, let's talk about the **flight zone**. What would you do if suddenly I try to come too close to you? You move away, right?

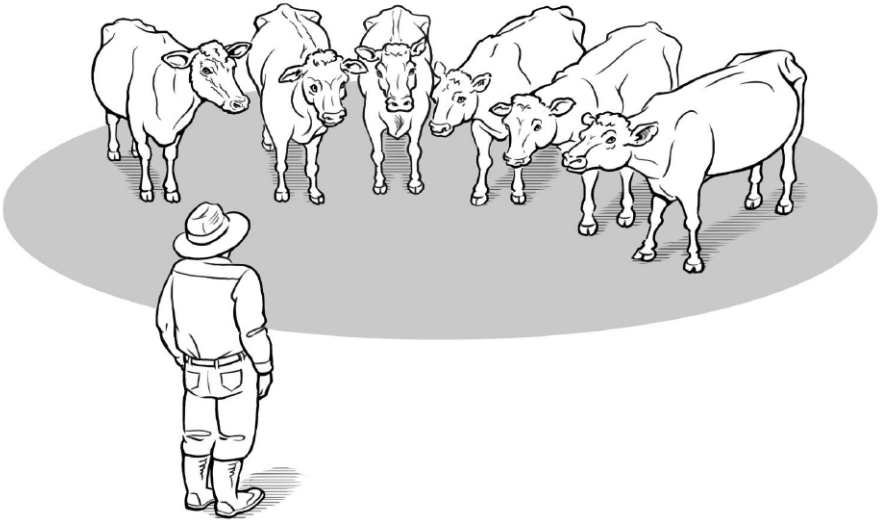
In the same way you tried to move away when I came too close, a cow will also feel uncomfortable if someone unfamiliar is too close. Cows determine an imaginary safety area around themselves. This area is called the **flight zone**. A bull's flight zone is larger than that of a cow. For a bull, it will generally be about 20 feet around.



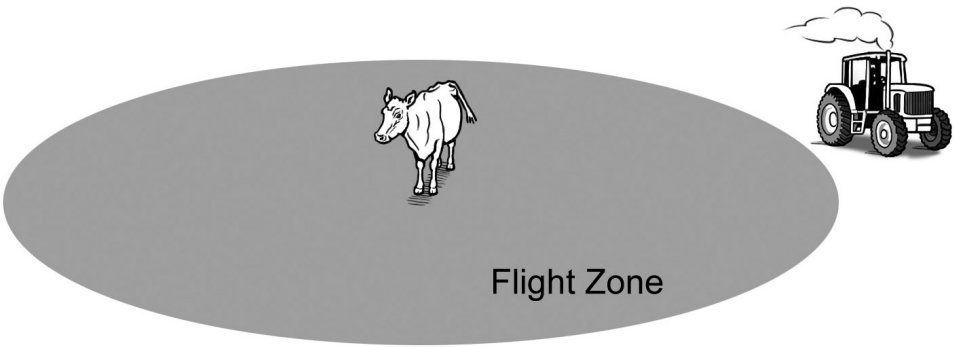
When the handler enters the **flight zone,** the animal moves away, trying to keep its distance. The more comfortable a cow feels with the handler (or when there is a barrier in between), the smaller the flight zone will be.



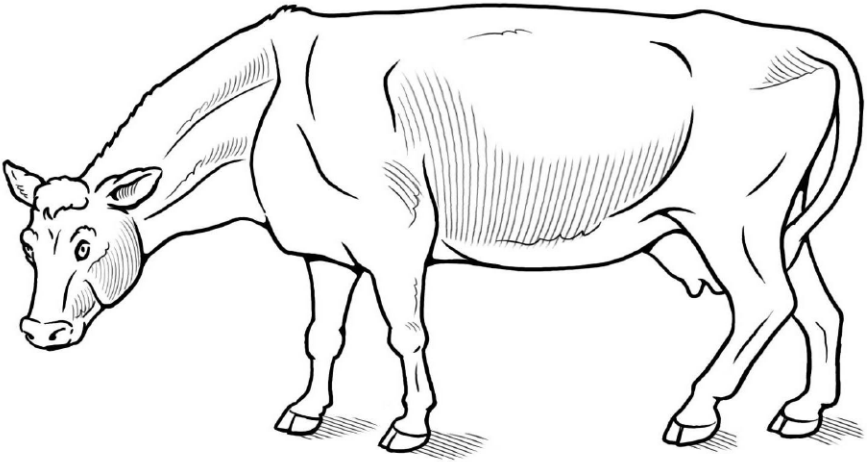
When the handler is **outside the flight zone**, cows/bulls will turn their bodies, keeping an eye on him. Cows are curious animals; they want to see what is around them.



When cows/bulls are agitated, the flight zone is wider. **For signs of stress, look at their tail and ears**; when the tail is relaxed, the animal is relaxed. Look to see if their ears are pointing; cows point their ears toward a source of concern.

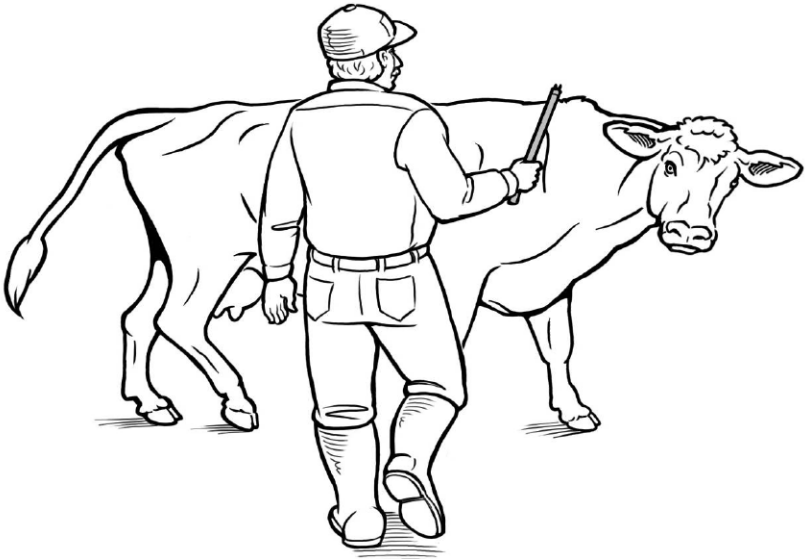


When its tail is tucked between its legs, the animal may be sick or frightened. The more stressed a cow/bull feels, the longer it will take for the animal to calm down, and the more hazardous it could be to handle.

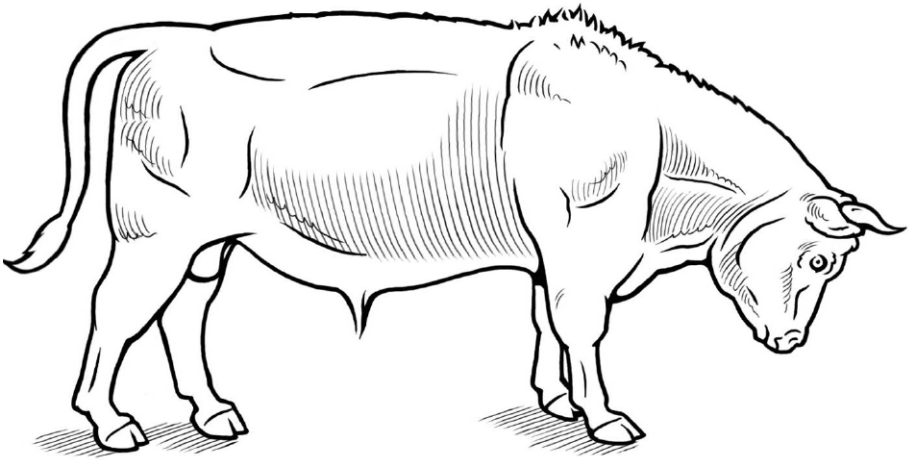


If an animal is lying down and does not try to move away when you are approaching, something is wrong. Do not try to move it by yourself, because the animal may be sick or hurt. You do not know how it may react if it feels threatened; you could be kicked, crushed or bitten.

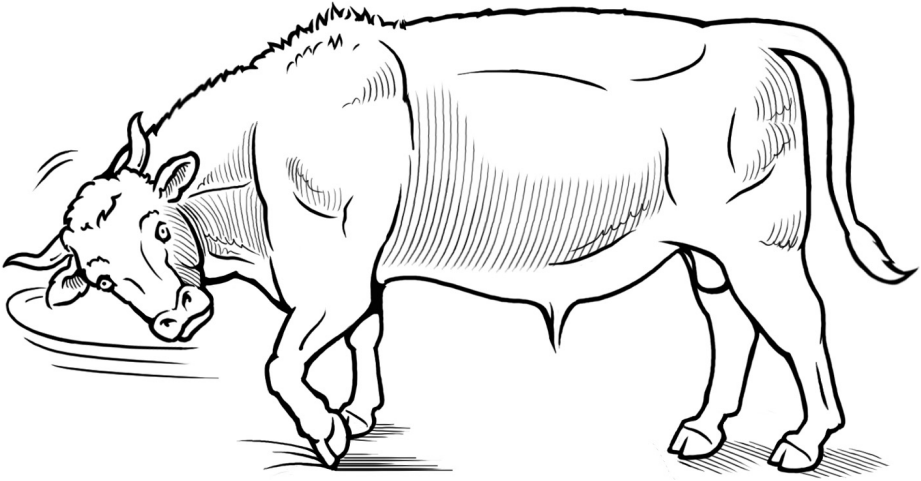
Cows/bulls have an excellent memory for good or bad experiences. For example, once an animal is hurt with a prod, just seeing the tool may cause it to feel stressed again, and you will not know how it may react.



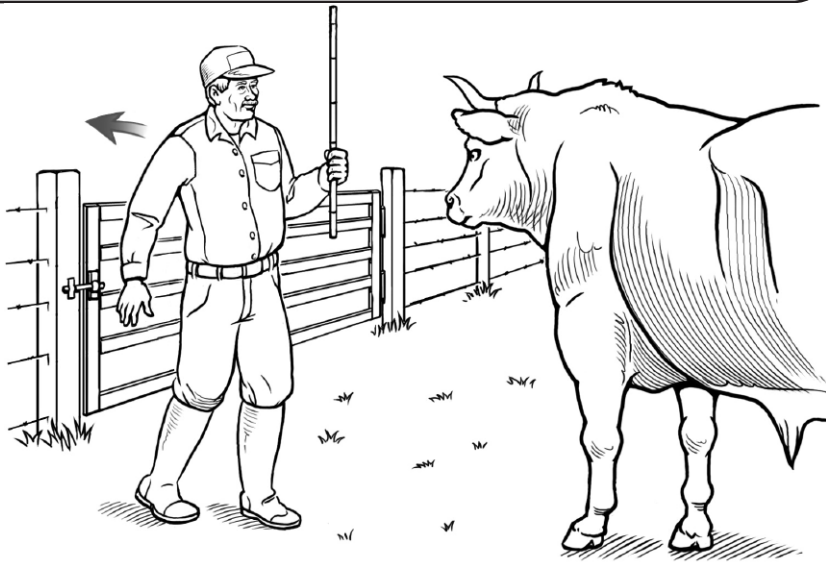
Other signs of stress are butting, bellowing and kicking. Paying attention to these signs is important, especially around bulls – **it means they are ready to attack!** When a bull is getting ready to attack, it may also display a broadside view, with his head lowered, its back arched, and its neck curved towards the threat.



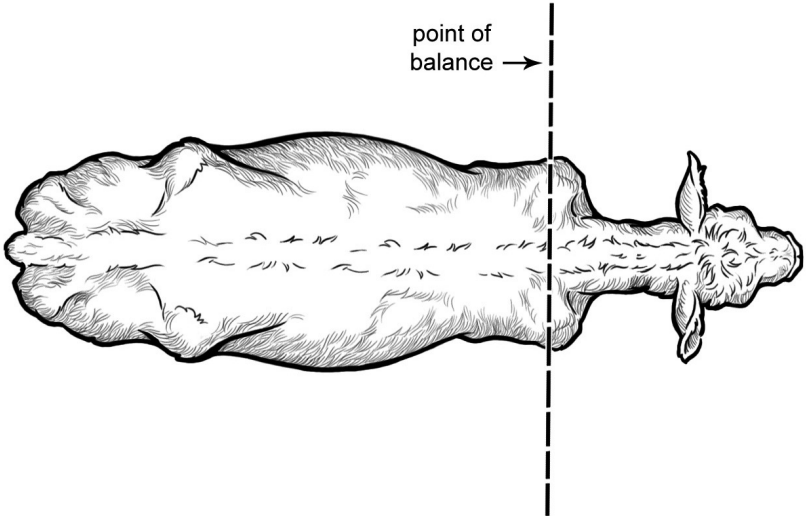
Other **signs of a bull getting ready to attack** are shaking its head rapidly from side to side and pawing the ground with energy.



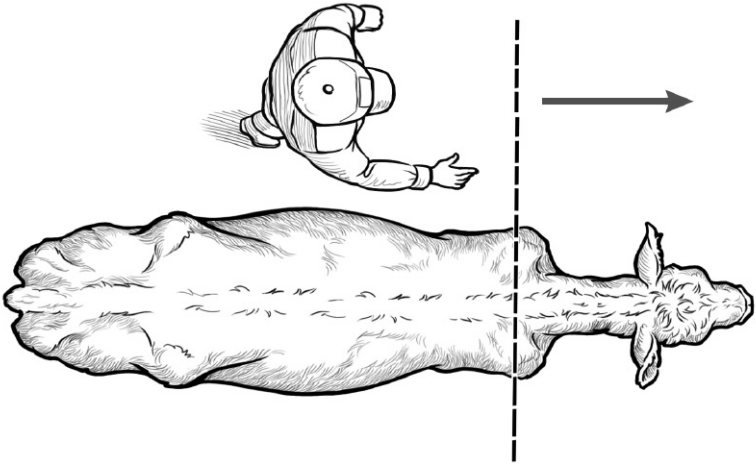
If you see a bull displaying attack signs, NEVER try to run because running may start a chase. Also, **NEVER turn your back** to the bull. Move away from its flight zone calmly, always facing the animal. You may use a cane or plastic pole to look bigger.



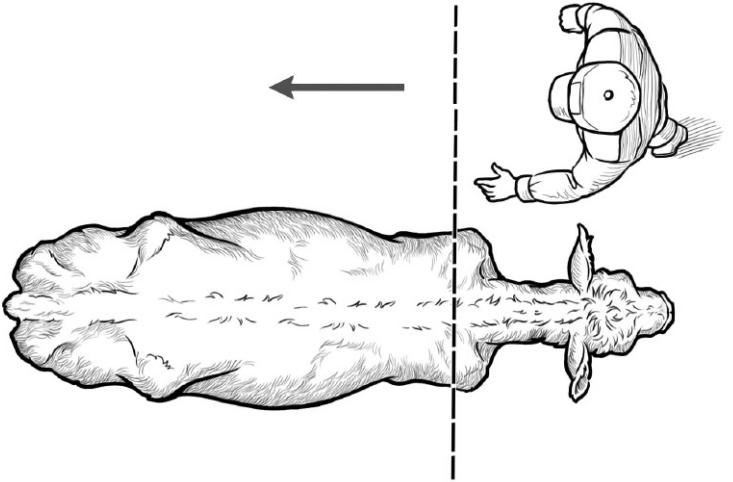
The next important thing to understand is how to move the animals without touching them or shouting. To do this, you need to know where the **point of balance** is. The point of balance is at the animal's shoulder.



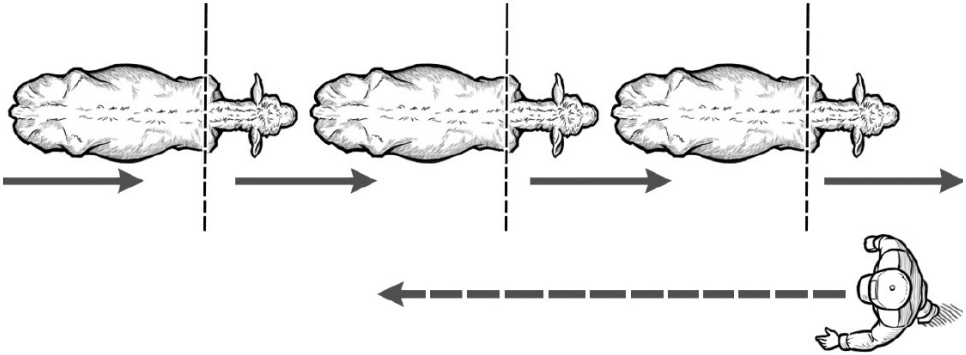
All species of livestock move forward and/or backward as the handler moves in relation to the animal's point of balance. If you want an animal to move forward, position yourself behind the point of balance.



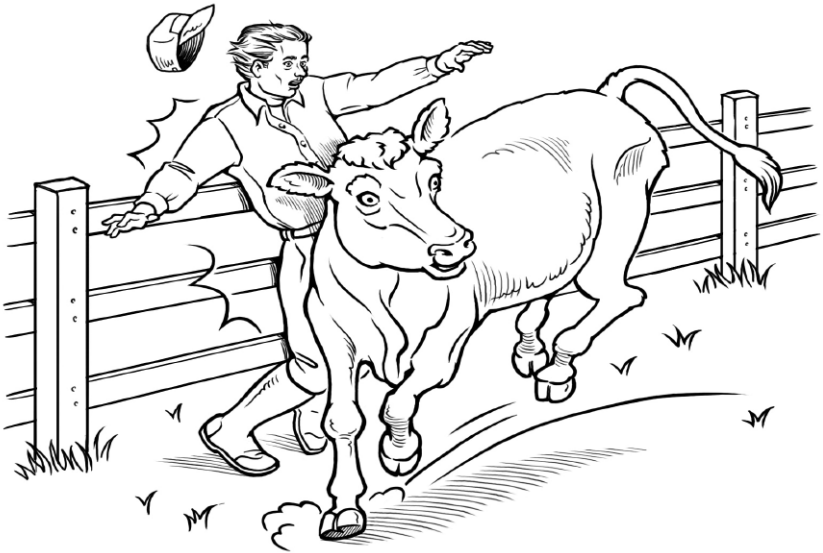
If you want it to move back, stand in front of the point of balance.



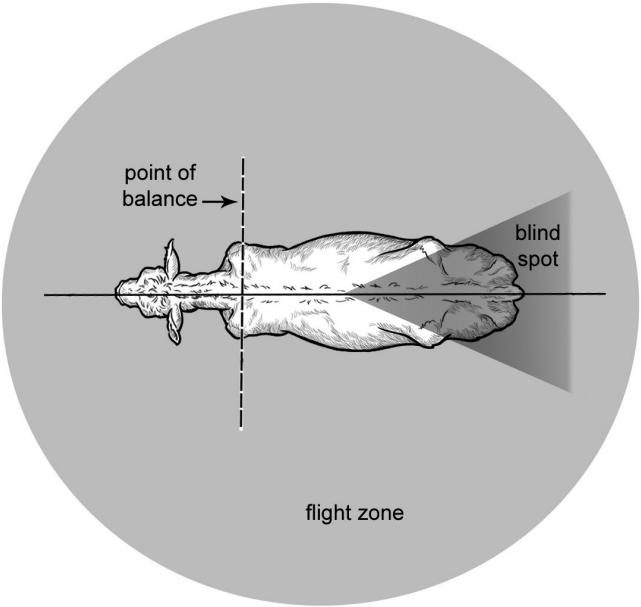
Groups of animals will often move without prodding when the handler walks past the point of balance in the opposite direction he wants the animals to move. It is not necessary to prod the animals.



When moving an animal, **always have an escape route**, in case something happens. Do not place yourself between an animal and a fence or a wall; they are big animals and can hurt you when moving.



Remember, to work safely around these animals, you need to understand **(1) the blind spot**; **(2) the flight zone**; **(3) signs of stress**; and **(4) the point of balance.**



Cows are herd animals – this means that they want to be together and will follow each other. Once one of them walks in the direction you want, the rest will follow. Just reposition yourself in relation to the next animal; they will keep moving. Remember to keep your movements slow and controlled because sudden movements may cause them to become frantic.

Thank you, José. Your advice was very helpful.
These are usually gentle animals. **Good handling practices will reduce their stress and reduce your chances of getting hurt**. Do not be afraid; you are in control!

This fotonovela is part of the Dairy Safety Package developed by the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS), University of California, Davis. These materials are part of the Worker Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program (WOSHTEP), which is administered by the Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation (CHSWC) in the Department of Industrial Relations through interagency agreements with the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP), University of California, Berkeley, the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS) and the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH), University of California, Los Angeles.

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