



## Farm First Newsletter December 2017

### Is your cattle handling system safe and efficient?

This month we have devoted most of the newsletter to this one topic for a few reasons. As you may have heard, Antonella, one of our TB testers broke her arm during a TB test, so we had to address what could have been done to prevent the accident. We have also been made aware that there will be a new round Farm Business Grants available in January, which may provide 40% funding for new handling equipment.

One thing that is common to all farms in this area regular TB testing and having a crush and handling system that works well for this job will save us all time, stress and reduce the risk of injury to man and beast. The TB test itself is a quick procedure – what takes the time is getting the cattle in the crush and trying to clip, measure and inject in the correct site, which may be difficult or dangerous to reach due to crush design and the animal moving.

As cattle vets we see a huge number of farms of varying size and type. Each farm has its own individual type of cows and its own way of handling them. There is no such thing as a perfect, 'one size fits all' handling system that works on every farm. What your neighbour has may work well for them but may not work for you. However, there are definitely good handling systems and bad handling systems.

A good, efficient system will have a race so that animals can be held there prior to coming into the crush.

#### Designing and Building a Race System

- Space- where on the farm can all groups of cattle be brought to it easily?
- How many cows do you want it to hold?
- There should be gates strategically placed so the vet/farmer can examine especially from the rear end!
- There should be a gate at the end, so the cows can be shut in
- Outside or inside?

Cows are naturally curious so sweeping corners work well; they are more likely to come around a corner on their own then go down a long straight race where they can see potential danger at the end.

Their natural desire is to go back to where they've come from so circling round makes them think they're just going back to where they started. Solid sides for the race work well so they can't see people outside the race and be distracted or scared, however they do make it harder to tap cows forward.

Think about where your race is and what the light is like. Cows can be funny about changing light and shadows.

The holding pen needs to funnel cows down into the race and it is useful to have a gate attached to the end of the race to encourage them down.



Sticks are a very useful tool if used correctly. They should be an extension of your arm to tap cattle along or *move* them out of a corner. They are not to be brought down with excessive force onto the animal in order to make them move. Too often we see unnecessary force used with sticks, it isn't pleasant for anyone and it is usually counterproductive, as the cattle just plant themselves on the spot or spin and turn the other way. Farms where cattle are handled with lots of shouting and whacking of sticks are easy to spot. The cows are flighty and easily spooked. There is no better indication of a farmer's way with cows than how quiet they are when being handled.

## The Crush

You need to pick a crush that does what you need it to do. For the following bit the focus is on the yoke and ease of TB testing. In this part of the country you're all TB testing more than you want to be, so you might as well have the right kit to make it easier on everyone. If your TB test takes ages because your system is poor, it's costing you money especially if you have hired labour. It's **worth your while** to have something decent in place! Additionally, handling cattle using equipment that is substandard is

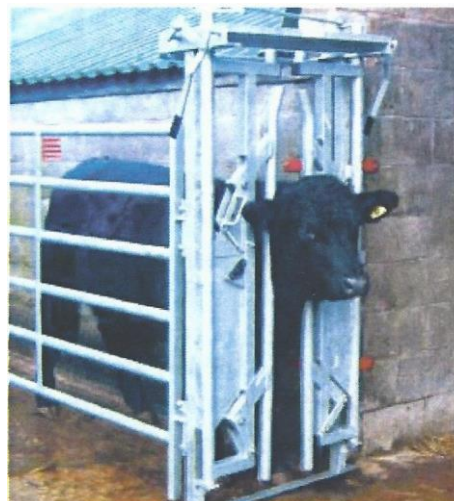


dangerous for animals, vets and staff.

## Scissor Yokes

Ask any vet what kind of crush they think is best, nearly everyone will say that they don't really care as long as it has a scissor yoke - in terms of speed of getting animals into and out of the crush these are the winner. They are quiet, and the vet can operate them on their own. The cows can see loads of daylight through them and the mechanism is such that it is difficult for the cows to burst through them and escape.

Self-locking yokes the self-locking yokes work well if you're working by yourself. But for TB testing they are a nightmare, the cows inevitably move backwards and forwards behind the yoke which is very annoying when trying to inject.



They're noisy, they don't entice a cow to come in because they block the daylight and you need someone to operate them while the vet tests. You would need a bar, rump rail or at the very least someone with a stick in-between cat le because the next cow rushing in can easily bash her way through before you've got them closed. If you have one of these yokes, the addition of a head scoop on the front will make them a lot easier and safer to use for both TB testing and drenching cattle, as they can no longer throw their heads around.

## Bateman classic crush



These aren't bad crushes. There tends to be minimal work which is good for vets examining cows. They're quiet and cows seem to be quite happy to go into them. You do need two people to operate it as someone needs to be on the front gate as the yoke won't hold cows rushing through. If you have one of these green models, it's probably pretty old.

How's the floor? I've seen a cow just run off with one of these stuck around her because there was basically no floor – not ideal.



### A word about feet

If you have one of these Bateman classic crushes you should alter the yoke by removing the lower panels. This gives us more room to get our arms in and makes testing a lot easier. You can also make your own tubular bar structure to put on the yoke to make it narrower to assist in catching calves - basically impossible in these crushes.

### Locking head yokes



These are a useful tool for handling cattle. You can PD in them and you can also TB test in them. It's extremely quick, always good for testing so you can get done and the cows can go back to bed. They are around £300 for 7 yokes.

### Additional Crush Parts

- Rump rails - stop calves running backwards when you release the yoke
- Head scoop - useful for bolusing or for giving oral fluids
- Weigh scales - really useful tool for getting service weights for heifers or checking weight gains in youngstock
- Calf head restraints – disbudding
- Foot blocks
- Belly bands
- Some crushes can make the width narrower to make it easier for testing calves - this is an excellent feature as it stops them turning around.

In order to treat lame cows, you need to have an effective safe way of getting the cows foot up. Most crushes can get a back foot up fairly easily, front feet tend to be a bit trickier. WOPA have some excellent front foot blocks - a worthy investment. They have a metal hook attaching the foot firmly to the block so there is no need for additional ropes.



If you are doing routine trimming regularly on the farm we would recommend getting a dedicated foot crush. They are specifically designed to make foot trimming easier and will be infinitely better than a standard crush with foot blocks added on.



Many thanks to the George Farm Vets for providing the photos and the majority of the text in this section.

**Liver Fluke and Worm Treatments at Housing** There is a high risk of liver fluke in cattle and sheep, and there seems to be a lot of confusion out there about which products to give and how long after housing. If you would like some advice whether your animals need to be treated, which product and when to give it, please contact us. We also have a selection of competitively priced products in stock.

**Winter rations for suckler cows** Winter rations for suckler cows should be formulated and fed according to the stage of their breeding cycle, their current fitness and target body condition. The aim is for cows to calve down at a body condition score of 2.5 to 3.0 else their future health and fertility, and calf viability can be compromised. The body condition score targets for suckler cows vary through the year. In the winter months, spring calvers should have a BCS of 3.5 when calves are weaned, but then a gradual reduction in condition is required to ensure they calve down at 2.5 to 3.0. Similarly, autumn calvers, served over the winter months need to be CS 3-3.5, but then eventually calve down at around 3.0.

Cows that are over-conditioned at calving are more likely to give birth to larger calves and require assistance, and possibly Caesareans. We have seen evidence of this over the past few weeks, when we have been busier than usual with autumn calvers. Calf viability is also compromised – there is a higher stillbirth and mortality rate in the first 24 hours with 'fat' cows. Prolonged calvings are also more likely to result in infections and 'dirty' cows will take longer to return to healthy cycling. If cows are under-conditioned, this compromises future reproductive performance. The thinner the cow, the poorer the quality of eggs ovulated post-calving, and the longer it takes for the ovaries to resume cycling.

Cows should ideally be divided into three groups: fat cows, average condition cows of BCS 2.5-3.0, and a third group of thin cows and any heifers which are calving at two years of age. This third group is particularly beneficial for maintaining condition in the heifers and also the first lactation cows at calving. Body condition scores can then be adjusted simply by increasing/decreasing the quantity and/or quality of silage fed. Thin cows may benefit from the provision of a supplementary concentrate. For over conditioned animals, straw should be added into the ration so that total daily DM intakes can be maintained, despite reductions in the quantity of grass silage being fed. But this does take time, so you need to plan ahead and allow time for animals to gain or lose condition. BCS can also be adjusted by delaying or advancing the time of weaning.

Bull condition is also important! Bulls should be on a rising plane of nutrition in the 6-8 weeks prior to the breeding season. They should have a BCS of 3.0 by the time they are put in with the cows. The ability to accurately evaluate the body condition of cattle is essential to make the right decisions on rationing. Farmers who are unsure of how to do this, there is information on the HCC and DEFRA or you can ask us.

**Staff News** We would like to welcome Nuria Ponce to the practice. She has joined us from Spain where she qualified in 2015. She will be carrying out mostly TB testing duties to start with. Our other TB tester, Antonella, broke her arm recently at a TB test so will be having a bit of time off to recover. We look forwards to her rejoining us in the New Year.

### **Christmas Joke**

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates. "In honor of this holy season," Saint Peter said, "You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven." The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. "It represents a candle," he said. "You may pass through the pearly gates," Saint Peter said. The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells." Saint Peter said, "You may pass through the pearly gates." The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's glasses. St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize? The man replied, "They're Carol's."

### **Christmas Opening Times**

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> December CLOSED  
Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> December CLOSED  
Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> to Friday 29<sup>th</sup> December- OPEN AS NORMAL  
Monday 1<sup>st</sup> January CLOSED  
Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> January OPEN AS NORMAL  
**EMERGENCY 24 HOUR NUMBER TEL 01873 840167**

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all the team**

