

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Beef cattle producers learn improved stockmanship skills to increase profits

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Stockmanship School instructs cattle producers on low-stress livestock handling to give them an edge when working cattle and increasing profitability.

The Situation

For more than 25 years, a few people in the beef cattle industry have advocated for improved cattle handling techniques to improve animal welfare and producer profitability. Recently, there has been an increased interest in cattle handling techniques referred to as low-stress livestock handling.

Today beef consumers are sending strong signals to the beef industry that they prefer to purchase beef products that come from animals that have been handled and cared for in a humane manner. A recent survey conducted by Merck Animal Health indicated that animal handling ranked as the most important animal welfare topic where training is needed, ranking even higher than identifying and treating sick animals.

Our Response

To meet these demands, a comprehensive, introductory Low-Stress Livestock Handling School was organized and hosted at the University of Idaho's Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center in Carmen, Idaho. The three-day school combined classroom instruction and hands-on experience.

Instruction was provided by low-stress livestock handling instructor Whit Hibbard. Les Nunn, an



Stockmanship school participants receive important instruction on working with cow-calf pairs. Photo courtesy of Les Nunn.

Extension educator in Bear Lake County, assisted and coached participants during the hands-on sessions.

Participants learned low-stress livestock handling principles and techniques, as well as about having a proper mindset, a positive attitude, and reading, working and preparing animals. These lessons learned in the classroom were then applied by working live cattle in the center's feedlot pens and grazing paddocks.

Program Outcomes

There were 11 participants from both Idaho and Utah. They were all very engaged and had a positive experience while participating in the clinic.

A pre- and post-test was given to each of the participants to measure knowledge gained during the clinic.

The paired samples T-test indicated a significant (≤ 0.05) increase in participants' knowledge of low-stress livestock handling before the clinic compared to after the clinic. Table 1 shows mean scores before and after the clinic.

Table 1. Understanding of low-stress livestock handling

| | Before | After |
|------|--------|-------|
| Mean | 17 | 24 |

It was interesting to note that the average number of years participants had in handling cattle was relatively high, at 25 years. One could assume that individuals with that many years of cattle handling experience would gain little from a cattle handling clinic. However, participants seemed quite surprised by what they learned. The following participant quotes are just a few examples.

- “It was excellent, I learned many things to put into practice.”
- “Great program. I learned a lot of new skills and principles. Didn't realize how much I didn't know.”
- “It was fantastic and extremely worth going to. I will be able to use as lot of what I learned.”

Four participants reported owning a total of 3,175 head of cattle. These same four participants also reported that they estimated a savings and/or earnings of approximately \$20 per head, through implementation of the practices they learned during the clinic. This would result in total savings/earnings of \$63,500 per year for just four cattle producers who attended the clinic.

The Future

As producers continue to become aware of improved cattle handling techniques there will be an increased demand for stockmanship clinics such as this one. With increased demand, future livestock handling workshops and educational programs will be imperative to equip livestock producers with the tools needed to effectively handle their cattle and increase profits.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Nancy M. Cumming Research, Extension and Education Center
- Western Extension Risk Management Education Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Les Nunn, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Bear Lake County • 208-847-0344 • lnunn@uidaho.edu

Justin Hatch, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Caribou County • 208-547-3205 • jlhatch@uidaho.edu

30-19-lnunn-stockmanship • 10/19