Use caution around farm animals

Fair season has started in our area with the Putnam County Fair. Even for the rest of the summer, there will be an opportunity to enjoy a county fair in Ohio. Many of us like visiting the livestock barns to see the various types of animals and different breeds in each category.

We enjoy celebrating the accomplishments and success of 4-H and FFA livestock projects.

However, seeing livestock in their pens and in shows may give us a false sense of security, to the point that we let down our guard and forget that animals may behave in unpredictable ways.

Livestock can revert to instinctual reactions when they feel threatened or stressed. Injuries that are common when working with livestock include bites, kicks, being stepped on, pinned against a solid surface, or being overcome by a single animal or the whole herd.

The Ohio State University Extension ag safety and health coordinator, Kent McGuire, recommends the following guidelines when working around livestock:

- Understand and study the typical behaviors of the livestock you are working with.
- Herd livestock, such as cattle or sheep, can become agitated or stressed when one animal is isolated from the herd.
- Maternal female livestock can become aggressive in an effort to protect their young.
- Mature male livestock can become aggressive in an attempt to show dominance.
- Understand aggressive warning signs — such as showing of teeth, ears laid back, raised hair, snorting, or stomping of feet.
- Recognize that livestock such as beef, swine, sheep and dairy cattle are generally colorblind and have poor depth perception, which may cause the animal to balk at contrasting shadows or rapid changes from light to dark.
- Avoid startling an animal by making it aware of your approach before getting too close. Approach from an angle that allows the animal to see you.
- Move calmly, deliberately, and patiently. Avoid quick movements or loud noises that may startle animals.
- Excessive changing of the animal's environment or daily routine can take the animal out of their comfort zone.
- Avoid being in travel paths during the feeding of a herd or large group of livestock.
- Be aware of your surroundings and always leave an escape route when working in close quarters with livestock.
- Be patient and avoid frustration when working with difficult or stubborn livestock. Back injuries, muscle strains and slip/fall injuries can occur when frustrations lead to over-aggressive handling practices.
- Bottle fed or show livestock can become playful because of constant handling. After being placed back in with the general livestock as an adult, they may still approach you in a playful manner when you are not expecting it.
- Use the proper personal protective equipment to prevent injuries and exposure to diseases you can get from livestock.
- Utilize good housekeeping practices in barns and livestock facilities to prevent slips, trips, or falls.
- Plan and consider your safety and the animal's safety when loading and unloading into trailers.

Caution should always be used when around livestock. Over the years, I have known too many individuals who were seriously injured by livestock, including veterinarians, farmers and Extension agents. Animals at the fair are used to handling and being around people, but still use caution and be aware of your surroundings.

Fortunately, fairs have designed barns and show rings for our safety and have implemented procedures to minimize potential problems between fair participants and livestock.

For more information on livestock safety at the fair, see the two-minute video at the following site: https://youtu.be/IN9bXRe27T0

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for the Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu.

Lentz can be heard with Vaughn Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFNN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXN-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.