Dairy Cattle Safety

Compared to beef cattle numbers, the number of dairy cattle on most farms is minute. Safety, however, is just as important even though we think of dairy cows as gentle animals. A recent Minnesota study showed that as many as two-thirds of animal-related accidents in that state happened on dairy farms.

Dairy cattle can be easily startled and even the most docile cow will take a swing at you once in a while. As with all livestock, they should be handled gently and with respect.

With regard to the milking barn, elevated milking stalls, as opposed to flat stalls, have lowered the incidence of kicking. Another new concept in milking parlors is parallel placement of stalls with milking taking place from between the hind legs. The more traditional herringbone milking parlor layout, with milking from the side, is more likely to result in kicking. One dairyman related that those who have tried the parallel layout are convinced that it is much safer than milking from the side.

Be particularly careful when milking cows with teat or other injuries. Anticipate the worst possible response from injured cows and take necessary precautions. Be sure others working near the parlor know which cows are injured, nervous, or tend to kick.

Dairy bulls have long been the subjects of farm horror stories. They tend to be much meaner and more aggressive than their beef animal counterparts. With the availability of artificial insemination there is really no reason to have a bull on the dairy farm today. This alone eliminates a tremendous potential for injury. If it is necessary for dairy bulls to be on the premises, extreme caution should be exercised at all times. The dairy farmer should use special facilities so that a bull can be fed, exercised, watered, and used for breeding without ever having to come into direct contact with him.

For the older dairy farmer, care should be taken to make sure equipment and facilities are well maintained. Because they are handled more frequently than just about any other farm animal, the potential for an injury accident is a definite reality.