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Judicious Use of Electronic Stock Prods on Livestock

With the introduction of Western Instrument Company's new electric stock prod "The Stinger", it is worth briefly discussing the judicious use of these instruments on livestock.

Tremendous improvements have been made in the last 10 years with regard to more humane handling and movement of livestock. One key development is the amount of information that has surfaced on the subject of livestock handling facilities. In the past, little consideration was given to livestock movement through certain livestock facility designs. Nowadays, livestock's movement is just as important, if not more important, than animal handler's convenience with certain designs. Also, the study of livestock behavior has resulted in a wealth of new information. Certain people have "cow sense", that uncanny ability to understand what livestock are thinking, what makes them not want to enter a chute or how to move them without being physical. Animal behaviorists through extensive studies are beginning to understand why livestock respond the way they do to certain situations.

By combining enhanced designs with a better understanding of livestock behavior, livestock nowadays are being handled with more brainpower and less physical means. The end result for livestock is less trauma, injuries and stress. For animal handlers, these improvements probably have resulted in less personal injury.

Electric stock prods have a place in livestock handling, but they should not be used as a substitute for poor facility design, inadequate training of animal handlers and a poor understanding of livestock behavior. There will always be certain animals that don't respond to well-designed facilities or proper animal handler activities. In those cases, having a stock prod handy may be just the "nudge" that certain livestock need.

If you have any questions whether your livestock operation has a good design and training, simply stand back and watch and listen as livestock move through the chutes. If livestock move through with little hesitation, crowding, require very little use of electric stock prods and things are fairly quiet, you probably have a pretty humane handling situation. But if you notice that livestock hesitate constantly, only move in the right direction with use of electric stock prods and/or whips, animals are vocalizing excessively and animal handlers are yelling, then you may want to evaluate your operation. Examine the design of your facility and animal handler training to see if there aren't changes that can be made to make livestock handling easier for both livestock and handlers.

As it was stated earlier, electric stock prods have a time and place on probably every livestock operation. What shouldn't happen at every operation is to use electric stock prods every time, every place.

