



Victorian Farmers Federation Livestock Group

Livestock Factsheet

» Yards and Loading Facilities



Livestock handling facilities can affect you and your animals in several ways. Well-designed facilities can allow you to handle and manage your animals in a safe, effortless and relatively stress free fashion. Conversely, anyone who has used poorly designed or inadequate yards would contest to the fact that they can be inefficient, stressful for you and your animals and potentially dangerous.

If you have livestock (regardless of whether you have one animal or 1,000), due to the need to administer tags, vaccines, medications, Vet inspections and load or unload animals for transportation, you must have some form of yarding equipment and loading ramps. This document is aimed at giving you some guidelines to assist in having a safe and efficient environment to work.

When establishing or reviewing yarding and loading facilities it is best to first consider the following:

- What is practical for your operation?
- What is going to be safe for you and have best consideration for the welfare of your animals?
- What are your legal requirements for yourself and other people (for example transporters)?

Below are some elements that can help you out when considering facility design, OH&S and transportation.

Designing a facility

There are a myriad of holding facility designs available from a number of companies. However, you need to consider key elements, such as the following points when designing or reviewing a facility:

- Location and site (consider accessibility, drainage capacity, soil type, shade, water, protection from dust and wind, and proximity to where you will be mustering from)
- Ensure you have the appropriate building permits
- Have a sign on the facility, so transporters don't end up at the wrong location
- Yards can be constructed from a number of materials, so consider what you will be using the yards for when deciding what is best for your circumstances. Ensure the materials are sturdy and durable and select a material that won't injure animals (such as round or oval railing)
- Consider what surface will be best for your animals, non-slip concrete is beneficial in some areas, but in pens where animals will be held for long periods of time, the ground should be softer (to prevent foot soreness), and also have the capacity to be cleaned out
- You will need a crush for restraining cattle. Crushes can come in a number of designs, with a variety of side gates, vet gates, head bails (where you restrain animals), back slide gates, chin bars, animal squeezing (restraining) functions
- When selecting a crush consider if you can fit scales into it, if you have access to the neck of an animal (for vaccination), capacity for restraining animals, assess if it has good visibility (so animals will

move into it smoothly), if you want a manual, air or hydraulically operated crush, and also remember you can minimise costs when reinvigorating a crush by just replacing the head bail

- Raceways and ramps need to be adequate width and with a desirable gradient for smooth movement and loading of animals. Floors should also enable good grip so animals don't slip
- Ramps should also be in an accessible position for trucks
- You should consider whether you will require specific drafting facilities for sorting animals
- Sheep and Cattle require different facilities
- Different pens or yards have different functions within a handling facility, such as drafting, holding and forcing, and they can be combined in a number of formats during design
- Width and position of a gate can greatly affect how efficiently animals move in and out of a pen
- How a facility is designed should take into account how animals move. Using elements like curved raceways, rubber coverings, and reducing areas where animals move from light to shade can reduce baulking
- Including a barricaded working area will protect you from animals
- Chemicals (such as vaccines) are often stored near yards, so including a suitable, lockable facility (such as a fridge or locker – depending on the product) will be useful
- Ensure that you have feeding and watering facilities included in your yards, for the welfare of your animals
- Talk to your neighbours, visit their yards and also talk to your stock agent, they may be able to provide you with some local advice

Occupational Health and Safety Considerations

Working cattle and sheep in an intensive setting increases your OH&S risk. Cattle especially have a significant weight advantage over a human, and combining this with an element such as fear can have significant consequences for your safety. There are several things you should consider to reduce your risk of injury or illness.

Considerations are many and varied, but a selection is:

- Non-slip, well drained floors will minimise the risk of you or animals falling
- Facilities need to be built strong enough to handle the animals being worked in them
- Yards MUST be located so livestock carriers don't have to reverse across a public road, or when parked, block or partially block a public road
- Gates must be well greased and with good latches to ensure that they close rapidly and effectively
- A well sheltered area will prevent negative health repercussions such as sunburn
- Lockable facilities (fridges or lockers) will provide a secure environment for vaccines and other chemicals. Ensure that food is NOT stored in them, and that children cannot become trapped in them



- There should be adequate facilities for rubbish
- Be able to restrict access to the public
- Ensure there are enough well positioned emergency exit points from yards
- Do not let anyone stick their head/leg/arms into a raceway with animals in it
- Eliminate sharp or protruding objects from things such as rails, so you and your animals don't get injured
- Try to eliminate anything head height (to avoid potential head injuries)
- An effective and humane restraining mechanism in a crush to control animals
- Never bend over an animal's head
- Understanding why and how animals move will significantly assist you to effectively, humanely and safely handle animals. Ensure that you always use best practice animal handling techniques and ensure that your employees do the same (see Low Stress Cattle Handling)
- Minimise use of dogs, electric prodders, yelling and flapping clothing. This will stress stock and can make them more aggressive
- Know what to do in an emergency (download and have MSDS sheets at hand for the chemicals you commonly use)

Transporting

Transporting animals, even when done in accordance with best practice procedures is stressful for animals. There are elements of transporting animals that you must adhere to due to law and others that are for the benefit and welfare of animals. To minimise stress, and ensure you comply with the law and best practice, some important things to consider include:

- Yards **MUST** be located so livestock carriers don't have to reverse across a public road, or when parked, block or partially block a public road
- Be in attendance when the truck is loaded, and ensure that humane practices are employed
- Ensure the truck is appropriate for the task
- Observe recommended trucking densities
- Ensure animals are Fit to Load
- Any animals that need to be mixed – ensure it is done at least three weeks in advance to allow them to get used to each other and reduce stress. Avoid mixing with animals from other properties
- Load animals 2-3 hours before loading to allow animals to settle
- If possible, load horned animals separate from polled animals
- Load animals of a similar weight to each other
- Ensure that you have all appropriate paperwork completed
- If you are a part of a QA program, ensure that you comply with their transport requirements
- Be especially careful with young animals. For example, don't pull or lift lambs by the wool
- Muzzle all dogs

Take home yard and loading facility messages:

- Yard design should suit what they are being used for
- Human safety and animal welfare must be accounted for in design and use
- You must adhere to the legal requirements regarding transportation of livestock

For further information, please contact the VFF Livestock Group on 1300 882 833 or by email to Zoe Moroz on zmoroz@vff.org.au

Links

WorkSafe Victoria

<http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/609be5804071f3018f1edfe1fb554c40/beef+guide.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

Victorian DPI (Handling and Management)

<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/beef-and-sheep/beef/handling-and-management>
<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/beef-and-sheep/sheep/handling-and-management>

New South Wales DPI (Facility Design)

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/beef/equip>
<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/sheep/yards-equipment>

Many companies sell livestock handling equipment, such as

<http://www.kattlegear.com.au/>
<http://www.atlex.com.au>
<http://www.arrowfarmquip.com.au>

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