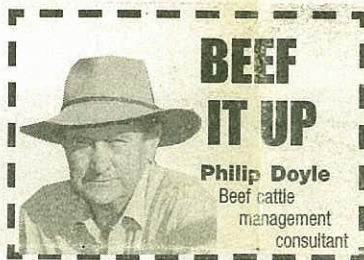




CATTLE YARD DESIGN: Thinking outside the square will make things easier for animals and their handlers.

Start thinking like a cow

When building yards, use a little science to please these curvaceous ladies



MAKE no bones about it, cattle yard design for ease of handling and safe operation has become a science.

A good place to start in yard design is to 'think like a cow'.

Such thinking requires accepting and using a number of concepts. Like it or not, animals like to move in circles and like to feel like they are moving 'through'. They will endeavour to always go back to where they came from if they don't get these feelings.

Being creatures always needing their own space, they do not like the feeling of not being able to go anywhere when being worked. So overcrowding of push yards or forcing yards immediately prior to the crush is

a no no!

It is so common for one cow to not want to go into the race, but on seeing one of her mates do so she shows no hesitation and in usual form follows a leader.

The use of conveyor belt or sheet metal on gates or forcing yards to prevent line of sight to their mates helps greatly when an opening is in front of them – the race that leads to the crush.

There is no doubt that round yards and curved races guide the cattle to where they want to go.

The beauty of a curved force yard and race is that the operator walks about only half the distance he would if the race was straight – very important for larger herds and aged

handlers.

Right angles tend to attract heads in corners and animals feel restricted or trapped. This only accentuates the excitement and temperament of both handlers and cattle.

Covering in the race with belting also prevents animals from seeing what's going on outside the race in front of them.

Light and shade across a race will naturally baulk cattle – a darkened race makes cattle keep going in search of light. Light then dark interrupts their travelling process.

The position of the handler is always important. The shoulder of the animal is a good reference point – move behind the shoulder and the animal will move forward.

Move in front of the shoulder and the animal will stop or move back.

But if the yard you and they are in is overcrowded and has the inevitable right-handed corner, cattle will not be allowed to respond to your positioning.

In building or remodelling a cattle yard, position the loading ramp where you want it. Then attach two side gates filled in with conveyor belting to it and then position the bail head and crush. From there – preferably curved – build the race.

The length of the race and the number of panels depends on

the herd size. Two panels plus the crush is necessary for even a one bull herd of 25-30 cows. In total this will hold three adult head – one in the crush and two in the race.

The forcing yard when a third full should hold three head. The yard behind in this instance would hold three or multiples of three when one third full.

Cattle have a flight zone which is directly related to an arc from the eyes. Some have large flight zones and don't like operators anywhere near them.

These are cattle that, because of infrequent handling, are frightened when their larger safety zone is threatened. That is when curved yards, force pens, races and conveyor belting come into their own. Cattle in these circumstances will move themselves with a minimum of pushing.

And a final comment on cattle yard costs – a quality prefabricated bail head and crush is certainly worth every penny.

With the price of timber, labour, machinery, chainsaw work, 120cm deep postholes, nuts and bolts and heavy gates, there is no cost comparison to a prefabricated, galvanised steel set of yards that can be erected in a few hours. Cost it out and, unless the labour and time is free, you will agree.