

Low Stress Stockhandling Guide

A Quick Guide on Yard Principles and Animal Handling



SUPPORTED BY



About this Guide

This guide provides practical Low Stress Stock Handling principles to help producers, workers, and contractors handle livestock more safely and calmly. It explains how animals see and respond, how handler positioning affects movement, and how good yard design improves flow and reduces stress.

The goal is simple: support calmer animals, safer people, and smoother work. The guide is easy to use for inductions, daily handling, or reviewing yard layouts. It forms part of the **Animal Health & Wellbeing Project**, alongside posters and the Yard Design Tool, giving producers practical, farm-ready resources.

Use it to build confidence, improve welfare, and create more efficient livestock handling systems across your farm.

1. Lead, Don't Force

The Core Rule of LSS: Be able to let, not force, animals to go where they want to go

Why It Matters: Working with an animal's natural instincts keeps them calmer and easier to guide. When livestock can move willingly in the direction they prefer, stress drops, behaviour is more predictable, and the risk of injury for both animals and handlers is greatly reduced. Calm animals also move more smoothly through yards, improving flow, reducing delays, and making every handling task faster and more efficient.

2. The Pressure Zone - Maintain Pressure

Animals rely heavily on vision to understand what is influencing their movement. They need to see the source of pressure to respond to it calmly. When livestock lose sight of the handler or lose sight of the animal leading them they often hesitate, stop, or turn back, because they no longer understand where the pressure is coming from.

To maintain smooth, predictable movement, keep yourself visible in one eye or the other. This gives the animal clear, continuous information and helps them maintain direction. Avoid constantly switching sides or making unnecessary "S-bend" movements, as this creates confusion and disrupts flow. Consistent, steady positioning keeps pressure clear and reduces stress for both animals and handlers.

3. Movement & Calm

Consistent Flow

Animals move best when flow feels natural. The Let-Up/Let-Back system uses their instinct to leave near where they entered, helping maintain steady movement through the yards. Work quietly and calmly, excess noise increases stress and disrupts flow. Clear, gentle pressure and a quiet environment keep animals relaxed and moving smoothly.

4. Yard Design

DO

- Keep yard sides parallel.
- Use rectangle shaped yards.
- Prefer race drafts for sorting.

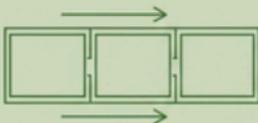
DON'T

- Design long funnels into the system.
- Use triangle-shaped yards (poor flow).
- Use pound drafts (causes stress and bunching).



DO

(Design for Flow)



Keep yard sides parallel.



Use rectangle shaped yards.

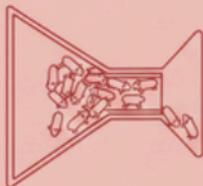


Prefer race drafts
for sorting

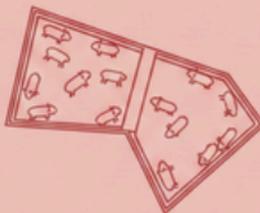


DON'T

(Avoid Flaws)



Design long funnels
into the system.



Use triangle-shaped yards
(poor flow)



Use pound drafts (causes
stress/bunching) ✦

5. The 'Two Cut' Rule

Design yards to manage capacity better:

- 1. Empty in Two Cuts:** Create yards that can be comfortably emptied in two cuts (groups).
- 2. Half Size Rule:** For sequential yards (moving toward the crush/race), each yard should be roughly half the size of the previous yard.

6. LSS Key Takeaways

- 1. Lead, Don't Force:** Work with the animal's natural instinct.
- 2. Parallel Yards:** Avoid funnels and keep yard sides consistent.
- 3. Safety First:** Design for clear human escape routes.

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210 Collins Street
Hobart, TAS, 7000
Phone: 0421 623 466
sprout.org.au



41-43 Wellington Street
Longford, TAS, 7250
Phone: 03 6332 1800
tasfarmers.com.au
