



Toward Better Stockmanship by Stan Potratz

Recent incidents (pro and con) at Premier have reminded me of critical differences that separate first-class stockman (and stock farms) from others. In order of importance (like layers in a pyramid with No 1. the foundation layer) these are:

1. Interest, passion and concern for animals. Without this interest, first-class stockmanship is impossible. If you don't care enough you won't take the time to inspect the herd/flock daily. If you don't care enough, you won't cover the entire pasture (it's amazing how often an animal in distress disappears to far-off hidden areas). If you don't care enough you will see a problem/need and "hope it goes away" until the animal(s) is/are past recovery.

2. The ability to observe animals. Recall the proverb "the eye of the master fattens the flock". First-class stockman don't casually look at (or count) their animals. They study them with a practiced eye that never stops looking for differences.

Examples:

- Those that aren't eating when most others are.
- Those that don't stretch after rising.
- Those with ears that droop slightly or eyes a bit less bright than the norm.
- Loose or off-color feces when it should not happen. (Good stockman are students of animal s*** as well as grass, feed troughs, water troughs, fences, etc.)
- Flies paying attention to a given animal (sure sign of a problem).
- Those that walk more slowly than others.

Some can observe in the field, pasture or feedlot. For others it's better to study animals in small groups and/or single file order. At Premier, we find our ewe flock benefits if we walk them through the handling system once a week.

3. The ability to respond to what one sees. Animal problems rarely occur on days when we have nothing else to do. So treatment moments are nearly always inserted into a busy schedule. If catching and treating an animal is difficult or time-consuming, we're all inclined to put it off. A good set of fences, lane-ways and yards is the essential to collecting, sorting and treating a group of animals rapidly without causing undue aggravation to the animals or the stockman.

If you need help with fences, lane-ways, corrals and yards, we gently suggest that you consider Premier as a possible source. We have products for most species, but see our sheep handling facilities (gates, panels, etc.) as suitable for sheep of small to moderate size. (It may seem immodest but we think our line excels at this because working panels are 36 in. tall-far easier for the shepherd.) Those with tall or very long sheep should look to other sources.