

Basic handling concepts

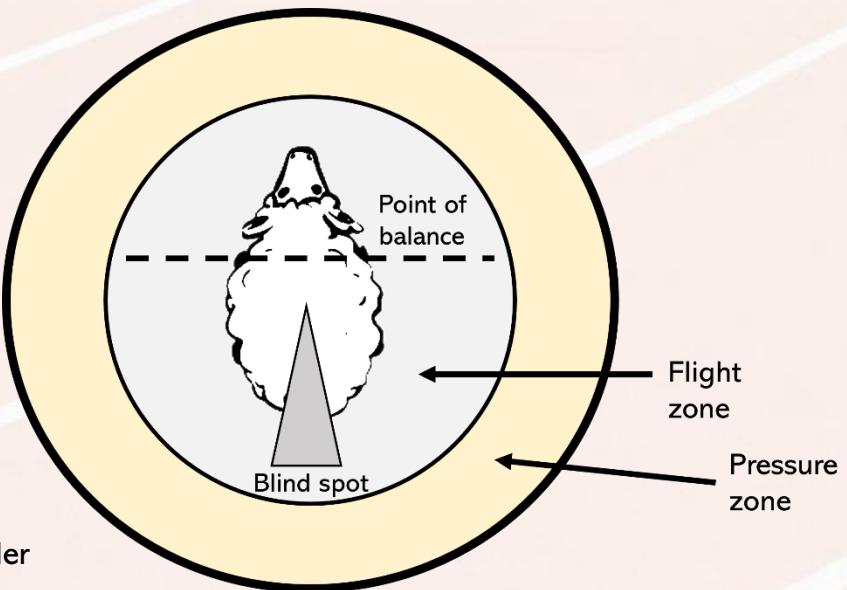
Stress caused by handling can negatively impact the health and well-being of sheep/goats. Low stress livestock handling techniques work with the animals' natural behaviors and are based on the belief that livestock can learn from their experience. They are also easier on the handler. When proper livestock handling techniques are used, it is usually not necessary to force sheep/goats to do something; they figure it out on their own. There are several important concepts.

One of the foundations of low stress livestock handling is the flight zone. This is the animal's invisible "personal space." The flight zone determines the distance from which the handler can work with the animal. When the handler steps into the flight zone the animal(s) move away. Flight zones can be complicated and vary by experience. The flight zone will be different for animals that are frequently handled versus those that have less human contact. Groups of animals also have flight zones.

The pressure zone is just outside of the flight zone. Animals react more calmly when the handler enters the pressure zone. It is also called an awareness zone.

In addition to flight and pressure zones, livestock have points of balance. An animal's point of balance is located at its shoulder and is determined by its wide-angle vision. When the handler is positioned behind the shoulder the animal will move forward, whereas it will move backwards when the handler is in front of its shoulder. The point of balance is especially important when moving sheep/goats through a chute.

Livestock cannot see directly behind them. The space they cannot see is called the blind spot. If the handler enters the blind spot, the animals may stop moving or turn around to look. It is best to avoid the animal's blind spot, as behavior can be unpredictable.



Tips for working sheep/goats

- Always use calm quiet movements (patience!)
- Work at the edge of the flight zone
- Apply pressure and release
- Let sheep/goats set the pace, only move them as fast as the slowest animal in the group
- Let a group mother-up before trying to move ewes/does and their offspring.
- Open panels for gathering and holding pens
- Solid sided panels for the chute (raceway)
- Movements towards daylight
- Handling facilities with good lighting and footing (no shadows or distractions)
- Only well-trained dogs
- No electric prods



Point of balance

