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Show Others

Animal handling expert Temple Grandin urges livestock producers to reach out to the public.

by Kindra Gordon

For the past three decades, animal handling expert Temple Grandin has devoted her career to telling livestock producers, feedlots and packing plants how to design animal handling facilities and manage livestock in a low-stress manner.

Now, she is encouraging producers to share with the public the care and commitment they have for the livestock they raise.

Grandin, who is autistic, credits her ability to think in pictures with giving her unique

insights into animal behavior, and the Colorado State University animal science professor has earned international acclaim for her expertise in animal handling.

Most recently, her work has included conducting animal welfare audits at meat plants for big retail businesses including McDonald's and Wendy's. And, this past February, her life was the subject of the HBO movie "Temple Grandin," starring Claire Danes. On Aug. 29 the movie won seven Emmy Awards including Outstanding Made for Television

Movie. (The DVD release of the movie hit shelves on Aug. 17.)

Particularly from her movie experiences, Grandin has learned that the public is very curious about what livestock producers do, and she says, "I think in ag one of the things we need to be doing is show others what we do every day when we care for livestock."

Grandin tells that during her HBO movie premiere, she was surprised that rather than talk about the film, the reporters wanted to know about the beef industry and slaughter plants.

"The public is curious about regular stuff, and we [people in the industry] should be the ones to tell them our story," Grandin says.

Utilizing YouTube

Grandin has been posting video footage of proper animal handling on YouTube for nearly two years, and she encourages ranchers to start doing the same. She suggests starting with a video tour of the ranch — showing simple everyday things like cattle on pastures and feeding the cattle.

She adds, "It doesn't have to be a professional video; have your teenage son or daughter help you with it."

Grandin reports that her YouTube posts have had more than 300,000 views — and says those numbers prove that nice videos can be more popular than some of the nasty animal abuse footage. "I've gotten several nice comments, and I see it as a great way to educate others about the cattle industry," she says.

Grandin acknowledges that occasionally nasty comments will come in, but they are in the minority. She advises that if you choose to respond to negative comments, control your anger and share facts with the individual.

Grandin is hopeful that by building relationships with the public — through YouTube and social networking sites — they will better understand how farmers and ranchers care for the livestock and are stewards of the land. And she says it's possible someday that the public will become advocates for the industry as well.

Give them a decent life

That said, she reminds producers to make low-stress animal handling a priority. Temple says, "You've got to look at everything you do as if someone were watching. Ask yourself, 'What would my wedding guests think of this?'"

She adds, "I'm often asked 'How can you care about animals and eat meat?'" Her answer: As long as animals have been given a decent life, she has no issues with eating meat. She reiterates, "We've got to give them a decent life." **HW**

Reminders for proper animal handling

Animal behaviorist and Colorado State University professor Temple Grandin's primary advice to people handling livestock is to get rid of any distractions.

Grandin explains that because she is autistic, she is a visual thinker just like animals. She says, "Autistic people and animals pick up on details" — and it's those details that are important in improving animal handling.

She adds, "One of the things I want people to do is to become much more observant and remove the distractions affecting livestock. Little things like noise and shadows can ruin a well-designed facility because animals will balk and turn back or refuse to move."

- Grandin's No. 1 rule for people around livestock is to remain quiet.
- Don't keep animals penned alone. "One of the most dangerous animals is the lone animal," says Grandin. Being alone is highly stressful, so bring some other animals in with it, she suggests.
- If animals get too excited, Grandin says they need to be given 20-30 minutes to calm down before you try to work them.
- A flag can drive cattle effectively, says Grandin. If a stubborn animal refuses to move, she says a hot shot should be used on them one time and then put away.
- Keep the color of facilities the same so cattle don't balk at differences in light and dark.
- Use rubber mats in front of a chute (or loading ramp) to prevent cattle from slipping as they move out.
- Also note any items on the ground — such as a pipe or board in the alley — that cattle may balk at. Either remove it, or cover it with dirt so they don't notice it. If the open sides along the alley or chute bother them, consider covering those with plywood as well.

For more about Grandin's books and livestock handling techniques visit www.grandin.com. **HW**

