

## Livestock Working Facilities: How much does it Cost?

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Labor and material costs in constructing livestock working facilities can eat a livestock producer's lunch and put a serious damper on the checking account. However, the cost of working facilities is not so expensive when the costs associated with not having facilities are considered. It would be beneficial to look at three aspects: 1) cost of not having facilities, 2) where costs can be reduced, and 3) a range in total cost of facilities.

First, what are the costs associated with not having livestock working facilities? Several situations come to mind that have a financial impact on an operation. Some of these instances include not being able to assist a cow with calving, not having a place to quarantine and treat sick cattle, and not being able to provide the appropriate herd health program to the cattle herd or stocker cattle.

Many cattle producers have made it years without having working facilities, and there are probably several readers of this article thinking they have made it just fine. This may be the case, but the question is if having facilities would have resulted in greater profits or if a working facility would have already paid for itself.

There is no doubt a person can wait until a cow is exhausted in the pasture and then tie her to the tractor to deliver a calf, but the chances of the calf being alive are slim. Alternatively, a cow experiencing calving difficulties can be walked to the working facilities early on in the process and the chances of saving the calf are higher. Similarly, how does a person treat individual sick animals in the pasture? There is a dart gun that can be used to administer antibiotics, but what would one do if the animal had an open wound? Not to belabor the point, but how is a herd health program administered without working facilities? The value of a herd health program including deworming and vaccinations will not be discussed here, but they have a tremendous value from a nutrition, reproduction, and marketing standpoint.

Second, how can costs be reduced when constructing livestock working facilities? The first thought to cross most people's mind would be the cost of material and equipment. This is definitely an area where costs can be reduced. However, more money will be saved by properly planning a working facility than any other aspect of the construction. Producers should attempt to plan facilities that are safe for the handler, safe for the animal, can be operated by a single person, and are easy for cattle to navigate. Facilities meeting these four criteria will save a lot of labor and sanity.

Third, what would it cost to construct livestock working facilities? The costs will range widely based on material used, equipment purchased, labor necessary to build the facility, and the amount of "sophistication". The most basic working facility requires a sturdy perimeter, a working alley, and a head gate or squeeze chute with head gate.

The perimeter may be made out of cattle panels, corral panels, guardrails, or part of an existing structure such as a barn. Most perimeters will require several posts to support the perimeter. The cost of the perimeter will be dependent on the material used and the size of the holding facility. Assuming a 4,000 square foot facility, the material cost of the perimeter will likely range from \$900 to \$2,100 when purchasing all new material. A working alley and head gate or squeeze chute is also necessary. The alley leading to the head gate or squeeze chute can be made out of wood or similar materials as used for the perimeter and will cost another \$200 to \$400. Head gates may cost as little as \$500 while manual squeeze chutes can range from \$3,500 to \$9,000. (Hydraulic squeeze chutes will cost more.)

There are other costs that come into the picture for more sophisticated configurations such as holding pens, weigh system (scale), sweep tub, or load out alley. The need for each of these is dependent on the number of animals to be worked, the need to separate groups of animals, and the desired ease of use. Regardless, it is easy to see material costs can dig deep, and these costs do not include labor for construction.

At the end of the day, livestock producers should have some type of working facility. The facility will be safer for the handler and the animal as well as provide the livestock producer a place to provide the proper health care treatment to their animals relative to no facility. It does not take long for a good livestock working facility to pay for itself.