

DATE: January 3, 2003

FROM: Minnesota Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (MN FACE) Program
Minnesota Department of Health

SUBJECT: MN FACE Investigation 02MN027
Farmer Dies From Injuries Sustained After Being Attacked By A Bull

SUMMARY

A 42-year-old farmer (victim) died after he was injured by a bull. The bull had not shown any prior signs of aggression toward humans nor signs of illness or disease. On the day of the incident the victim had been working with his brother at his brother's farm place. Around 3:00 p.m., the victim left to return to his farm place to do various chores and the evening milking of his cows.

The next day, the victim's brother became concerned when his brother did not arrive by late morning to work on various tasks. He drove to his brother's farm and found him lying in a muddy lot near a barn. He notified emergency personnel and after the victim was examined they prepared to remove him from the lot. About the same time, the bull became aggressive toward the rescue personnel. The victim's brother tried to herd the bull from the scene but the bull charged him and pinned him against a fence. A law enforcement officer at the scene responded and used a gun to kill the bull.

After the bull was killed and the victim removed, the victim's brother concluded that the dairy cows had not been recently milked. He also found a cow inside an addition built onto the barn. A newborn calf was also in the area and the cows hind legs were loosely tied. It appeared that the victim may have assisted in "pulling" the calf. In doing so, his hands and clothing may have obtained the scent of the birth of the calf which may have provoked an attack. An autopsy revealed that the victim had numerous broken ribs and several internal injuries that injuries indicated the victim had been attacked. Because of the aggressive nature of the bull toward rescue personnel, the most likely scenario was that the bull attacked the victim. MN FACE investigators concluded that to reduce the likelihood of similar occurrences, the following guidelines should be followed:

- workers should exercise caution whenever they are working with or near farm animals; and
- animals that attack humans should be examined and tested for possible diseases such as rabies.

INTRODUCTION

On August 26, 2002, the MN FACE program was notified of a farm work-related fatality that occurred on August 22, 2002. The county sheriff's department was contacted and a copy of their report of the incident was obtained. On October 30, 2002 a site investigation of the incident was conducted by a MN FACE investigator. During the site investigation, the victim's brother was interviewed and provided information about the incident. During MN FACE investigations, incident information is obtained from a variety of sources such as law enforcement agencies, county coroners and medical examiners, employers, coworkers and family members.

The victim was a 42-year-old farmer who had grown up on a farm in the local area near where the incident occurred. He attended a local technical college for two years after high school and received a degree in farm mechanics. After college he returned to farming and for most of his life, farmed with one of his brothers. Primary farm crops included corn and soybeans plus hay for their dairy herds. Although the victim primarily worked for his brother at the time of the incident, they maintained their own herds of dairy cows. The herds were kept on separate farm sites that were located approximately one quarter of a mile apart.

INVESTIGATION

A 42-year-old farmer (victim) died of injuries he sustained after he was injured by a large bull. He had a herd of about 40 dairy cows and a three-year-old Holstein bull. The bull weighed about 1600 pounds and had not shown any prior signs of aggression toward humans nor signs of illness or disease. The bull had been owned by the victim and his brother for about two years. They had a system of buying a young bull every year and using it for one year to breed young heifers that the victim's brother owned. After a year, the victim would keep the older bull for another year for breeding his herd of slightly older dairy cows after which it would be sold.

On the day of the incident, the victim had been working with his brother at his brother's farm place doing routine late summer farm activities. Around 3:00 p.m., the victim left to return to his farm place which was located approximately one quarter of a mile away. He routinely returned to his farm at this time to do various chores and the evening milking of his dairy cows. In addition to his normal chores, at this time he had a cow that was soon to give birth to a calf.

The next morning, the victim's brother became concerned when his brother did not arrive by mid-morning to work on various farm tasks. The victim normally arrived between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. after he had completed the morning milking of his cows. When the victim didn't arrive by late morning, the victim's brother drove to his brother's farm place to investigate. He found his brother lying on his back in a muddy fenced lot near the dairy barn. The victim's brother initially thought that his brother had possibly died of natural causes. Neither the victim nor his clothing were dirty or showed any significant signs of being harmed by any of the cows or the large bull. It was apparent that the victim was deceased and had been so for some time. The victim's brother used a cell phone to notify emergency personnel who arrived shortly after being notified.

After a coroner examined the victim and pronounced him dead emergency personnel prepared to remove him from the fenced lot. About the same time, the bull became aggressive toward the rescue personnel in the lot. The victim's brother tried to herd the bull away from the scene but the bull charged toward him and knocked him down near a fence. A law enforcement officer who was at the scene quickly responded and used a gun to kill the bull.

After the bull was killed and the victim removed, the victim's brother assessed the scene. He concluded that the dairy cows had not been milked either that morning or the previous evening. He also discovered that the cow that was due to deliver a calf was inside an addition built onto the side of the barn. A newly born calf was also in the area with the cow and the cows hind legs were loosely tied. From this, it appeared to him that his brother had noticed that the cow was about to give birth. He put her in the enclosed area and may have assisted in "pulling" the newborn calf. In doing so, his hands and clothing may have obtained a strong scent associated with the birth of the calf. This scent may have been noticed by the bull when the victim returned to the lot to heard the cows into the barn for milking and caused the bull to attack him.

An autopsy on the victim revealed that he did not die of natural causes. It revealed that he had 10-12 broken ribs and several serious internal injuries. These injuries indicated that the victim had to have been attacked by one or more of the cows or the bull. Because of the aggressive nature of the bull when rescue personnel were at the scene, the most likely scenario is that the bull attacked and fatally injured the victim.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death listed on the death certificate was multiple traumatic injuries due to attack by bull.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Workers should exercise caution whenever they are working with or near farm animals.

Discussion: In general, farm animals are not aggressive and are unlikely to attack farm workers. However, under certain conditions such as when they are herded into or held in confined areas, or when they are protecting their offspring, they may become aggressive and attack workers. In addition, because of the unpredictability of farm animals they may occasionally attack workers even if unprovoked. Workers should exercise caution whenever they are working with or near farm animals, no matter what the situation or apparent temperament of the animals. Whenever workers enter livestock pens, lots or fenced pastures, they are exposed to the risks of being injured and should always be aware of the location of confined animals. This is especially important if the area contains large animals that may be capable of causing serious injury to workers.

Recommendation #2: Animals that attack humans should be examined and tested for possible diseases such as rabies.

Discussion: Whenever a person is seriously injured or killed by an animal, the animal should be examined and possibly tested for illnesses that may have contributed to the animal's behavior, especially if the animal was exhibiting any unusual behavior prior to an incident. Testing for certain conditions such as rabies requires that an animal be destroyed which might have financial implications and considerations for the owner. In this case however, the bull was destroyed because it threatened the safety of rescue personnel at the incident scene. Since it was killed, it could have easily been tested for rabies or other conditions that may have contributed to its aggressiveness however, it was not tested. In this case, the bull had not shown any symptoms of illness or disease and its behavior may have been entirely natural and characteristic for a bull of its breed and age.

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