

## PRCA and Livestock Welfare

The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) is deeply committed to the proper care and treatment of the livestock used in rodeo. As an association, the PRCA:

- ★ has established rules and regulations governing livestock welfare,
- ★ created an animal welfare committee to assist in the association's efforts to ensure proper care of livestock,
- ★ conducts livestock welfare surveys to identify successful practices and areas for improvement,
- ★ educates its membership regarding best practices for livestock handling,
- ★ monitors compliance with its livestock welfare rules and regulations,
- ★ educates the public and elected officials about the care provided to rodeo livestock,
- ★ networks with other organizations about best livestock practices and policies,
- ★ employs a director of livestock welfare to coordinate all efforts relating to care and handling of livestock at PRCA-sanctioned events, and
- ★ works proactively with rodeo committees, stock contractors, contestants and veterinarians through on-site livestock field representatives to ensure all livestock at PRCA rodeos are being handled properly.

### PRCA Rules

The PRCA first began implementing rules to ensure proper care and treatment of rodeo livestock in 1947. Today, the PRCA enforces 60 rules that govern the care and treatment of the livestock participating in PRCA-sanctioned events – the strongest rules employed by any rodeo association. The PRCA continuously encourages all rodeo associations to adopt similar rules. The rules are enforced by professional judges who attend each PRCA-sanctioned rodeo performance. Punishments range from fines to disqualification.

Specific rules protecting the animals govern use of the cattle prod, require a conveyance to transport injured animals, require the facilities to be free of hazards to the animals and require the animals to be inspected before each performance; any animals not in top condition will not perform. Additional rules cover how long an animal can remain in transit before a rest and how many times an animal can perform in a specified period of time, and require that a veterinarian be on site for all rodeo performances and sections of slack at all PRCA-sanctioned rodeos. PRCA rules are recognized as the most comprehensive in the rodeo industry and its rules are used as a model for most other rodeo associations.

### Livestock Welfare Surveys

Among the most valuable tools used by the PRCA Livestock Welfare department are the periodic surveys it receives from independent veterinarians who are on site at PRCA rodeos, assisting the local rodeo committees with all livestock-related issues while serving as the rodeo veterinarians. Many of these veterinarians also assist the PRCA by participating in the survey, reporting to the PRCA the condition of the rodeo livestock and facilities. These surveys have continued to show a very low rate of injury to the livestock. The latest survey, conducted at PRCA rodeos during the 2010 season, included 148 rodeo performances and 70 sections of slack. Veterinarians reported 28 injuries to animals during 60,244 exposures, calculating to a rate of injury of .00046 – less than five hundredths of one percent.

### Outreach

The PRCA leads the way in creating livestock welfare procedures, rules and standards for American rodeo, and regularly networks with other rodeo associations to encourage them to adopt similar standards, which most have done. The PRCA has successfully built up its livestock welfare program to serve as a model to all rodeo associations. All PRCA-sanctioned rodeos have rules governing the care and handling of the livestock, and the PRCA regularly meets with other associations to network about rules, handling policies and other livestock welfare initiatives. Reaching beyond the rodeo world to other agricultural and animal use organizations is another important component of the PRCA livestock welfare program. By networking with other organizations, the PRCA shares its program and learns from other organizations about successful livestock welfare policies and procedures.

### Education

The PRCA livestock welfare education program works with not only the PRCA membership, but also the public, media, fans and elected officials. The internal education program focuses on informing

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members about animal health issues and advances in livestock welfare practices. Externally, the program distributes factual information regarding the care and handling of rodeo livestock and answers inquiries from any interested people or organizations.

### What you should know about the PRCA and rodeo livestock:

- ★ The average bucking horse or bucking bull works less than five minutes a year in the arena.
- ★ Rodeo livestock have long and healthy lives: Many of today's top bucking horses are 20 years old, and many bulls are active buckers at 15 years of age. Veterinarians attribute these long, healthy life spans to good care, quality feed and adequate exercise.
- ★ PRCA rules prohibit the use of sharpened spurs and other implements that could harm an animal.
- ★ Human skin is one to two millimeters thick; horse hide is five millimeters thick; bull hide is seven millimeters thick.
- ★ Stock contractors invest a great deal of money in their breeding and purchase programs; many contractors pay up to five or even six figures for a top-rated bucking animal. Naturally, they are very motivated to take care of these investments.
- ★ Both bulls and horses have natural bucking tendencies; many do so while playing together in pastures, just as horses naturally race each other. What makes an animal a candidate for rodeo livestock is the absolute determination to buck if something is on its back – often an inherited characteristic, which breeders now work carefully to bring out in "Born to Buck" programs.
- ★ PRCA rules require flank straps to be lined with fleece in the flank area (similar to a human waist); flank straps are tightened just enough to encourage the animal to kick behind itself instead of hopping around the arena. Overtightening would result in the animal's refusal to move at all, much less buck. Flank straps do not contact an animal's genitals.
- ★ The PRCA prohibits the use of electric prods in competition except for horses known to be "chute stallers" – that is, they sometimes hesitate coming out of the chute and then may start bucking in the chute, creating risk to themselves and possibly to contestants. The prod may be used in this case if, and only if, the judge, stock contractor and contestant agree that it is necessary to protect the safety of the animal and/or contestant.

### Quotables

#### Veterinarians

**Dr. Doug Corey, DVM:** "I'm proud of the PRCA's commitment to animal welfare."

Rodeo committees and stock contractors do an excellent job of caring for their livestock and keeping them in top condition, says Dr. Doug Corey, DVM. "Many of these animals become a part of (the stock contractors') families. In ProRodeo, I have never seen a malnourished animal or even one in need of changes in their feed program. While hauling, the contractors provide the best care available. Most stock contractors have large ranches where the stock can exercise and run when they are not at rodeos. Being turned out (to pasture) is important for muscle development, stamina and their attitude. Animals that are not in top condition and receiving the best of care will not perform to the top of their ability. And committees start preparing the arena long before the rodeo begins, making sure that the ground is level and free of rocks, and that fences have no sharp protrusions that could injure an animal. I'm proud of the PRCA's commitment to animal welfare."

**Dr. John Wenzel, DVM:** "Stock contractors and rodeo committees are constantly discussing animal welfare, trying to make sure that livestock get the comfort and care they deserve, so that they will perform at their best as athletes."

New Mexico Extension Veterinarian Dr. John Wenzel has been in private practice for 24 years – and he's worked with six to eight PRCA stock contractors at around 40 rodeos. "Every stock contractor I've been associated with is extremely picky – they always want the best for their animals," he says. "Stock contractors and rodeo committees are constantly discussing animal welfare, trying to make sure that livestock get the comfort and care they deserve, so that they will perform at their best as athletes. I often use the PRCA's rules to help folks in other livestock industries come up with animal welfare standards

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### Pfizer PRCA Veterinarian of the Year, presented by Purina



#### Dr. Jake Wells

2012 Pfizer PRCA Veterinarian of the Year, presented by Purina

*"The vast majority of the (livestock health) issues we see are minor – mostly sniffling," says Dr. Jake Wells, San Antonio rodeo vet. "We often see some colicky horses, maybe some scrapes or cuts on the timed-event horses. (But) those roughstock horses and bucking bulls are tough as nails – they hardly ever have any problems."*

2010	Dr. Bill Anderson, Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show, Fort Worth, Texas
2011	Dr. Garth Lamb, Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, Las Vegas, Nev.
2012	Dr. Jake Wells, San Antonio (Texas) Stock Show & Rodeo

and guidelines for their own fields. I'm really proud to be associated with the way PRCA stock contractors take care of their livestock, and I think they are trendsetters in the area of animal welfare."

**Dr. Bill Anderson, DVM:** "The way roughstock are conditioned and the way they are transported with lots of room on the trucks ... they aren't stressed at all.... Health problems with roughstock are few and far between."

Dr. Bill Anderson, a second-generation veterinarian who actually moves onto the grounds of the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show (Fort Worth, Texas) each year, says he stays on site largely to provide care to the show animals like rabbits, chickens and llamas. Rodeo animals are very healthy, he says: "I want to be on the grounds if a calf has a respiratory problem or if a timed-event cowboy's horse slips and skins a leg when they arrive at 1 or 2 a.m. (but) the way roughstock are conditioned and the way they are transported with lots of room on the trucks – and they're so used to travel and the rodeo life that they aren't stressed at all – we have very little problem with the bucking stock. Sometimes, one might have a belly ache we need to treat, or one might bump her head on a chute and need sutures. But health problems with roughstock are few and far between."

**Dr. Garth Lamb, DVM:** Stock contractors "are tough guys, until you get to that soft spot they have for their animals."

"The NFR livestock superintendent, John Barnes, and his crew monitor all the livestock closely and contact us with any questions or problems that may need to be addressed," Lamb says. "We scrutinize them closely. If they are not 100 percent – even if they just have a snotty nose – are not placed in the draw (and will not participate in the next rodeo performance) .... The contractors brought their livestock to perform, but they are very good about following our recommendations, even if it does mean taking the animal out of the draw. It's not just about the money; they really care about them and get attached to them. They are tough guys, until you get to that soft spot they have for their animals."

**Dr. Jake Wells, DVM:** "Bucking horses have a little draft horse in them, so they have huge bones, stout musculature, big feet, strong ligaments ... they hardly ever have any problems."

"Those roughstock horses and bucking bulls are tough as nails – they hardly ever have any problems," says Dr. Jake Wells. "Bucking horses have a little draft horse in them, so they have huge bones, stout musculature, big feet, strong ligaments – there's a tremendous difference in the physical make-up of those horses, plus they are kept in pastures, not in stalls. We built a separate 100-acre facility about four miles outside of town and subdivided it into big grass pastures, with nice big water troughs. The animals can roam around, stretch out ... we think having a little time to behave like the plains animals they are helps them rest up and compete better. You don't win Indoor Rodeo of the Year seven times in a row without doing something right, and we feel like this is part of it."

### Stock Contractors

**John Growney, PRCA stock contractor:** "We treat our animals like we want to be treated."

When his trucks arrive at a rodeo, PRCA stock contractor John Growney of Red Bluff, Calif., observes his animals coming out of the trailers. "If you've done everything right, they feel excited when they get there," he says. "They know they're at a rodeo, they know the game and they're looking forward to it! You want them to come off that truck kicking and playing and bucking just for fun. If one isn't energetic, we rest him and don't buck him. We treat our animals like we want to be treated."

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**Ike Sankey, PRCA stock contractor: "A bucking horse has to want to fight, like a boxer; you cannot make them do that."**

In his 30 years of breeding and raising bucking horses, PRCA stock contractor Ike Sankey has learned to spot horses that will be successful in rodeo – those which inherently possess all the right ingredients. "If you put a flank strap on a nonbucking horse, he might buck once or twice. But they don't have that inner desire to continue, and if you continue riding them, they will give up. A bucking horse has to want to fight, like a boxer; you cannot make them do that. If I could just put a flank strap on any horse and it would buck, I wouldn't need to have 450 horses – I would just need to go get a few more flank straps."

**Jim Korkow, PRCA stock contractor: "If I left a loading chute and a truck in the pasture, the trailer would be full of horses all the time, waiting and wanting to go."**

Another longtime PRCA stock contractor, Jim Korkow, notes that bucking livestock are true athletes. "Most of our professional bucking horses save their energy for when the gate opens. They stand in that chute calm, not nervous. Some get themselves psyched up, like prizefighters going into the ring – they lean (against the chute) so they get more push to spring out of the chute. When a cowboy gets on, the horse tenses up because she's ready to go to work – she wants to stand that cowboy on his head and lawn-dart him! My bucking horses look forward to rodeo. If I left a loading chute and truck in the pasture, it would be full of horses all the time, waiting and wanting to go. The thrill of the road and the rodeo must get into their blood, because they will run over you to get into that truck!"

**Harry Vold, PRCA stock contractor: "A cowboy won't do anything to hurt the horse he's riding – that wouldn't improve his ride."**

Harry Vold, a PRCA stock contractor since 1965, says he treats his bucking livestock like the athletes they are, and that it's paid off with 20-year careers for many of his bucking horses. "We feed them the same as our saddle horses – 20 pounds of hay and eight to 10 pounds of grain every day. Like all PRCA stock, they're always in good condition – that's just as important for bucking horses as it is for racehorses," Vold says. "We use trucks designed for hauling horses in comfort – they are as wide as the highway department will allow them to be, with plenty of head clearance, dry floors, and sand or sawdust. We send a person ahead of the truck to get the pens, feed and water ready. And if a horse is not having a good day, we let him rest. Like a good baseball pitcher, you don't want to pitch him every night."

Vold, a lifelong stockman, inspects his livestock personally. Although he's glad that PRCA judges check contestants' spurs to be sure they follow PRCA rules regarding dullness, he also notes, "A cowboy won't do anything to hurt the horse he's riding – that wouldn't improve his ride. And the flank strap doesn't bother them at all – my horses buck maybe 25 times a year for 15 years, and I have never seen chafing from the flank strap on one horse or bull."

**John Barnes, PRCA stock contractor: "A horse that performed well might prance and hold her tail high .... (A bull) might go bellow in the pens a little, (but) he keeps his enthusiasm hidden: 'I know how cool I am.'"**

John Barnes, a second-generation PRCA stock contractor, says his livestock are bred to buck – the only things he needs to teach them are how to move in the alleys behind the scenes at rodeos, how to stand in the bucking chutes, and how to load into the trucks. "I watch for a horse that is level-headed, not flighty," he says. "I like one who stays filled out for his age and grows consistently. And when it's time to go on the truck, they go on willingly, because they want to."

Barnes believes his animals know when they've performed well. "A horse that performed well might prance and hold her tail high. A proud horse carries her head above her withers, and her mane flows toward her shoulders instead of just bouncing around," he says. "A bull doesn't have that 'I'm proud of myself' look, but he might go bellow in the pens a little, paw the dirt more or pick on his buddies. A bull keeps his enthusiasm hidden: 'I know how cool I am.' Horses show their feelings, and they might like to show off a little more."

Since the Barnes family produces rodeos across a broad swath of the U.S., he watches his animals closely during travel. "Like people, some travel really well and some get a little 'jet lag,'" he says. "We watch whether they eat their grain, whether they exercise, to see whether any of them has a stomach ache. We can't always buy the same feed (as at home in Iowa), and our animals will throw pellets in the air because they're not used to them, so we haul our own familiar feed. We watch the bulls to see if any are tilting their heads – they might have been grinding their horns into the dirt and have a horn abscess that needs to be treated. If they are eating well but losing weight, or if they didn't buck the full eight seconds, they might need to go home and rest for a while."

As for most PRCA stock contractors, "home" for Barnes livestock means extensive, green pastures and open space where the horses and bulls can roam, socialize, rest and rejuvenate – just as human contestants do between rodeos.

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Neal Gay, PRCA stock contractor: "It's just like being hands-on with your kids – if you're interested in them, you want to spend time with them."

"When I had 200 bucking horses, I could tell you every one's name and number, his disposition, whether he wants a left- or right-hand delivery (out of the bucking chute) and exactly what he did last time we bucked him," says veteran PRCA stock contractor Neal Gay.

"It's just like being hands-on with your kids – if you're interested in them, you want to spend time with them. We feed our stock every day, so if one doesn't come to the trough, we know we need to go check on him – he might have a stomach ache. We watch them in the pasture; if one is limping or doesn't look quite right, we bring him in and put him in the chute and see what's wrong with him. He could have stepped in a hole out there; if he can't put his foot down, he might have something stuck in it, like a thorn or a rock, that we need to take out for him."

Stock contractors invest several years of feed and care for young colts and calves before they have any idea whether an animal has the instinct and will to buck. Gay says spotting the winners is a fun part of the job. "I watch for a horse that really kicks his back feet out high every time," says Gay. "He gets into a rhythm, just like a quarterback gets into a rhythm throwing a ball. That's what makes a good bucking horse. When his front feet hit the ground, his back feet are kicking. They don't all start right the first time – sometimes you have to have an eye for the possibility there. You've cared for him for four or five years before the first time you buck him, so if he shows any fire, you give him every shot you can. Once they figure out their job, a lot of them like it."

Gay, who was known for aggressive bucking bulls, said that bull riders "don't want a bull they can't ride, they want one they nearly can't ride. And that's what people want to see – they don't want to see the rider get hooked, but they want it to be so close that it's thrilling. I've always had bulls with that disposition, but every now and then I'd get a bull like Joe Kool. He was a big muley (hornless) Charolais who was so nice and gentle. He'd spin, buck them off and then stop, turn around and walk out of the arena – never once thought about running over anybody. He would stand next to you forever, as long as you wanted to pet him. I loved that bull" (Joe Kool had 400 wins and 15 losses when he retired after a 10-year career.)

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