

Safety Zone Calf Catchers

Dannebrog, Nebraska

To be able to safely process new calves without threat...



Calf catcher with gate open.

By Kayla Sargent

Recent census data has reported the average age of the American rancher today is over 55. Cattle ranching is physically demanding, and every year of age makes meeting those physical demands more challenging. The Leo family in Nebraska has a true passion for the industry and has found a way to help producers remain on the ranch for as long as possible. "I've been in the cattle business all my life, and I'm 70 years old now," Dan Leo said. "I know the trials and tribulations along with the risks, safety concerns, and labor issues that are out there."

Innovative solution ...

Understanding these issues gave birth to an innovative solution for his own ranch, and this solution has developed into a large business that is reaching cattlemen virtually world-wide. Leo's Safety Zone Calf Catcher, a well-designed and ranch-proven device, enables one person to safely process new calves without threat from the instinctive mother cow. It is a durably built steel cage that quickly mounts to and dismounts from either an ATV or a UTV. The design permits it to travel over rough terrain, typically to many calving pastures. Most importantly, the catcher makes the whole process

The devices have been sold to commercial and seedstock ranchers as well as to large commercial feedlot calving programs, and they are proving to be successful in every venue.

easier on the operator, the calf, and the cow.

How it works ...

The operator captures the calf in the cage by driving up to the desired calf, maneuvering the cage until the calf is in the proper position, and then shutting the spring-loaded gate. Then the operator steps into the cage through the adjacent side entry door. The calf is moved to the rear holding compartment to tag, vaccinate, band, or even weigh the calf, which work is performed by the operator in the safety of the cage with the protective mother cow nearby. "Nearly all the cows will remain at the rear of the cage where they can see and smell their calf, which adds to their comfort level," Leo explained.

Industry acceptance ...

When the Leo family began using this device on their family-run ranch, they knew they had something worth sharing with the whole industry. What they didn't know was how fast this business would take off and the extent that it would grow. "I just knew that this Catcher would make

it easier for everybody involved and that it could help producers safely enjoy one of their favorite times of the year," Leo said. "So from that basis, we took the idea and started manufacturing and marketing. The demand was initially more than what we were prepared for as we could only build Catchers so fast. Now, we build Catchers in three locations to fill orders that have expanded to an international level."

Family business ...

Like many businesses in agriculture, family is the foundation of their operation and is key to their success. "It's a family-run business, and we like it that way. My wife Shirley and I are the owners. My youngest son Jona is the national sales manager, and my daughter Jennifer is the office manager," Leo said. "My son Joel and one hired man handle the ranching operation."

With much of the family tied up with the Calf Catcher business, Joel obviously utilizes the Calf Catcher plenty on the ranch. On their SimAngus/Angus seed stock operation, Apex Cattle near Dannebrog, Nebraska,

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 of the protective mother cow!**

Craig Oceanak, WY - "Our catcher is AWESOME! We have lots of wild range cattle, and we calve on rough ground. It is very valuable for a one person outfit, and it is a tool that I would not be without."

Cody Lee, MT - "We have concluded that purchasing our calf catcher was the best use of money that we have made in the last twenty years. This is a very well made piece of equipment, and it handled all of my concerns with rough terrain and ditches with flying colors."

Michael Hornecker, WY - "I wish I had found out about the Calf Catchers years ago. No more rushing to get a calf doctored or tagged before the cow gets on the fight. I work by myself and this has made my job a lot safer."

Alvin Haan, SD - "This calf catcher has been a godsend. I can send my kids out to tag calves and not have to worry. I am really impressed! Wished I would have gotten one years ago as it is a very good investment."

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Safety Zone

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ka, Joel and one hired man take care of 500 mother cows, the bull development, and that farming. “We run a pretty low labor outfit anyway, and with the Calf Catcher, one person is responsible for all the calf tagging, vaccinating, and weighing. For our outfit and our Calf Catcher customers, those overly protective mother cows do not require the assistance of an extra person to ensure safety,” Leo said.

Background...

The Leo family started the business approximately five years ago, and it has grown rapidly. From selling to neighbors at a local level, the company has expanded to include several international markets. Calf Catchers can now be found in every state in the U.S. and every province in Canada, as well as Australia, the United Kingdom, and both Central and South America. “Australia was our first international market beyond Canada. People there discovered us through our website and Facebook promotions,” Leo explained. “Two years ago, I personally introduced the Calf Catchers at a large farm show called AgQuip in New South Wales, Australia. We had amazing interest, so we secured an Australian distributor, and the rest has been history. We now ship containers across the ocean with fifty-plus Catchers in each.”

Marketing...

The entire Leo family has vested much of their time into the advertising and promoting of the product through print, digital, and social media, and they are quick to point out that their customer testimonials are included in all their advertising. The majority of their sales are the result of customers recommending the Calf Catcher to fellow producers. “The customers are building our business for us, and they are our best salesmen. They buy the Calf Catcher and tell their neighbors how well it works or what a good investment it’s been,” Leo said. “That’s really what has driven the

growth of our business to where it is today.”

Customer appreciation...

Leo’s personal appreciation for his customers is apparent as he can tell a story about many of them, remember what part of the country they’re from, and recall how

many neighbors purchased a Catcher due to their recommendations. From the beginning, his personal passion and connection to his customers has been important. “It’s been a fun thing. It’s interesting. It’s one thing marketing to cattle producers in the states, but when you hear from people



Calf catcher in road gear.



Calf catcher with calf loaded and mama watching.

in other countries like Canada, the UK, Australia, France, Denmark, or Chile, you realize it all started because one cowman bought one, which showed us the early potential," Leo said.

Terrain compatible...

The variety of terrain the Calf Catchers are now servicing is true testament to their build and usability. Their durable construction, attachment configurations for both ATVs and UTVs, and additional options that include a digital scale or tow hitch make them a good fit for almost any unique operation. "They're built really rugged," Leo said. "One of our customers is actually a retired mechanical engineer, and he told me, 'With how well you build these units, my kid's grandkids will be using them years from now,' and that's the truth of it. The units are built tough, and they're built to go over rough country. We're still using our original unit today. There's very little maintenance on them."

Successful everywhere...

The devices have been sold to commercial and seedstock ranchers as well as to large commercial feedlot calving programs, and they are proving to be successful in

every venue. As the industry transitions to the use of ATVs and UTVs more frequently, operations are already set up to use the Calf Catcher with an investment of \$2,000 to \$2,500 for the equipment. "Most everybody in the industry today has either an ATV or UTV in their operation already," Leo said. "So with a pretty low-cost investment, they are set up to continue in their operation about as long as they want to be involved." That's the Leo family's main goal with the business. As an older generation rancher himself, Leo understands not only the desire to remain in the business but also the challenges that come with it. "We have a passion for helping people stay in the business and do what they like to do without getting hurt," Leo said. "I've even got people in their eighties and nineties that are using them. Quite honestly, a

lot of people in the cattle industry today don't have any plans to retire, they don't know how to retire, or they don't want to retire. The longer they can stay in the business without getting hurt and without having their family worrying about them, the better they like it. That's where the Calf Catchers have a huge value."

The large success and fast growth of the Safety Zone Calf Catcher business has certainly changed the lives of the Leo family. Although they have had to shift some of their time and focus from Apex Cattle to the Calf Catcher, the family has managed to run two successful businesses. They still consider the largest successes of the Calf Catcher business to be helping their fellow cattle producers remain safe and to be able to do the job they like easier.

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