

## **CHAPTER 2. HARNESSING AND TRAINING**

### **2.2 TRAINING OF DRAUGHT CATTLE**

#### **2.2.4 TRAINING YOUNG DRAUGHT CATTLE**

##### **THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO TRAINING OF DRAUGHT CATTLE**

The training programme for draught cattle which was described in the previous three **Modules 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3**, comprises what may be considered as the traditional approach. Similar methods have been used for many years both at farmer training centres or during relatively short field training sessions in the rural areas in developing countries. The method has the advantage that each step is clearly defined and the course duration may be estimated within reasonably strict time limits. It is particularly suitable for training groups of farmers who have had little previous experience in the use of draught animals.

There is however a corresponding disadvantage to this rigorous approach in that it is aimed primarily at tackling tillage operations and so should normally be undertaken at the end of the dry season and before tillage is required. The animals are not usually in their best physical form at this time. Programming the course later will clash with more urgent field operations but, programming it much earlier risks that the training effect may be partially lost by the time the animals are needed to work in the fields, unless they are regularly exercised beforehand.

##### **PROGRESSIVE TRAINING FOR YOUNG DRAUGHT CATTLE**

An alternative approach is outlined in this Module which is designed to be progressive over a much longer period. It is particularly suitable for training animals from an early age and for training undertaken by the farmer alone. The method is not readily adaptable into a short term training course although the principles of the training approach could be taught. It is however a method which could be followed up through regular visits on the part of the Extension Officer who would monitor the progress of the farmer and the animals at regular intervals. As such, it is potentially a much more sustainable method than relying on courses.

##### **THE ADVANTAGES OF TRAINING YOUNG DRAUGHT CATTLE**

It is the custom, in some regions, to purchase more mature and heavier animals for draught work, only to resell them within two or three years. Considerable time and effort will then be

required to continuously train them and it is unlikely that they will achieve optimum performance before they are replaced. Indeed there is little guarantee that the animal will be "trainable" in the first place and may sometimes have to be replaced soon after purchase.

An attractive alternative consists in training animals from a very early age, taming them gradually and selecting, with greater freedom, those which are best adapted to later field work. The training is progressive and spread over a couple of years as the animal becomes stronger. In this way it can be much more effective and the advantages of keeping the same animal for a variety of tasks will soon become apparent.

### **SUGGESTED TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR YOUNG DRAUGHT CATTLE**

The programme has been divided up, for convenience, into three phases, depending upon the age of the animal. It is however a continuous programme and advances are made according to the needs of the farmer and follows the increased maturity of the animal.

#### **INITIAL PHASE**

The young animal should be tamed from a very early age of a few weeks, being regularly approached and called by name. Gradually it should also become used to being touched, although it will probably have to be held within a corral in order to achieve this.

At an age of more than a year, it can be introduced to the walking exercises described in **Module 2.2.1**. A rope loop should be made from a length of about 4 metres of rope and a slip-knot tied at one end. Approach the animal and calm it before placing the loop around its neck. Calm the animal down again and reward good behaviour. A few days of placing the rope loop can eventually be followed by encouraging it to walk forwards whilst holding it on the rope from behind.

#### **INTERMEDIATE PHASE**

Simple voice commands should gradually be introduced such as "Come here!", "Walk!" and "Stop!". Once the animal can be reasonably controlled at the end of the rope, the walking

exercises can be continued alongside working animals. They can follow ox carts or be encouraged to walk alongside the harnessed oxen. They can also accompany animals working with ploughs or harrows, again walking alongside them.

Castration can be undertaken at this time and the nose ring or nose rope fitted if this is to be used, as already described in **Module 2.1.7**. However, as the training has started at an early age, this more brutal treatment of nose punching should not be necessary and the simple use of a halter is recommended (see **Modules 2.1.5** and **2.1.6**).

After this experience of accompanying working animals and when the age approaches 2 years.

they can be introduced to the yoke and eventually used for light transport tasks, pulling a cart alongside a fully trained animal.

The procedure is similar to that described in **Module 2.2.2** where a "fast" yoke is used first to attach the two animals together. Walking exercises will be undertaken and the additional commands of "**Turn Left!**" and "**Turn Right!**" introduced. Once control over the animals is obtained, they can be hitched to the empty cart and the walking exercises repeated. Progressively the cart can be lightly loaded.

### ADVANCED STAGE

As the animal becomes more mature and used to working with the cart, training for field operations can be started. It will by then be aged about 2½ years old and is best put to work alongside the same trained animal with which it pulled the cart.

The yoke is fitted with the trek chain wrapped around clear of the ground. Walking exercises are undertaken and eventually the trek chain dragged behind so that the noise becomes familiar.

this fully trained condition it should be used throughout the year whenever possible, either in the field or for transport work.

### TRAINING SINGLE DRAUGHT CATTLE

Once the draught animal has become accustomed to working in a pair, it is relatively easy to train it to work individually. A special yoke and reins will be required as indicated in **Module 2.1.4** and progressively the animal is introduced to working with a cart, to field work and perhaps to water lifting operations.

Working with a single animal has the advantage that field work can be undertaken for longer periods as the animals are changed. It is important however that the implements be selected with a single animal in mind, being lighter and developing a lower draught force.



*Fig. 1 Use of a single draught ox for lightweight weeding between the rows.*

*Photo: Paul Starkey*