

## Let's Check the Bull Pen

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Walking the harsh prairie, fighting incoming snowflakes that are accelerating with each wind gust, is a difficult task, but one that needs to be done, as last year's bulls are slowly and methodically reviewed. If this were baseball season, the bull pen would get a lot of attention. Who's in the bull pen?

In fact, at times, all would review the player and appropriate baseball data in a speculative fashion as the coach ponders each inning of the game. Who's the coach going to pick? Perhaps baseball fans can claim the terminology; however, those of us in the cattle business also are very familiar with the bull pen. About the same time spring baseball kicks into gear, cattle producers find themselves admiring the bull pen.

Last year's winter scouting season may not have worked out for every bull desired; however, the pen looks good, and just like the baseball coach, one was excited to turn the bulls out.

What does this all have to do with today? We all get spring fever along with the excitement, but fall and winter blues seem to dampen the excitement. The end result? The bull pen goes unnoticed, but it shouldn't. Last spring's shining stars are out roughing it, and as Old Man Winter puffs and blows, the bulls run for cover.

Unfortunately, the bulls often are forgotten because attention is turned to the hustle and bustle of selling premium calves followed by preparing maternity pens for all those nice cows. Pregnant cows are in demand, but they would not be pregnant if it wasn't for the fertile bulls last summer. Each time the cows pass through the examination chute, the cringe hits when the local veterinarian hollers "open" and good old 6410 has to go. So, the question of the day is: "How are those bulls doing?"

A reporter called the other day wondering if there was a story on the cold weather and its impact on nursing cows. I noted that most cows are not nursing calves right now, except for a few fall-calving cows, but there certainly is a story regarding bulls and proper winter management.

Winters are tough on bulls. The bulls simply are left behind the barn to fend for themselves or even left to compete with a whole herd of boss cows for feed, which could mean weak, poorly nourished bulls in the spring. In addition, exposure to extreme winter weather may result in frozen scrotums. No matter what the reason, the result is bulls with a low fertility next spring.

The other day, the Dickinson Research Extension Center bulls were brought in for a prewinter check and weighed. Generally, the bulls were doing OK, but the center values all the bulls. There certainly was a difference between the older and younger bulls.

Of the Hereford bulls, five yearling bulls averaged 1,416 pounds, with four condition scores of 5 and one condition score of 6. Four 2-year-old bulls averaged 2,003 pounds, with all having a condition score of 7. The eight 3-year-old bulls average 2,344 pounds, with one condition score of 5, three condition scores of 6 and four condition scores of 7.

The yearlings averaged 1,282 pounds last spring, so they obviously still are growing. In comparison to last year's weights, the yearlings averaged 1,418 pounds, compared with 1,416 pounds this year. The 2-year-olds averaged 1,928 pounds, compared with 2,003 pounds this year.

Don't forget about the bulls. In general, with the value of beef, now is the time to evaluate, treat for external parasites and turn questionable bulls into cash. The center's bulls were doing fine, but three still went to market. One bull went to market for bad feet, one for poor performance and one for standing "his" ground.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com). For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0279.

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**Pre-Winter Evaluation of Hereford Bulls**  
Dickinson Research Extension Center

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Last Year Weight</b>	<b>Current Weight</b>	<b>Condition Score</b>
Yearlings	5		1,416 lbs.	5.2
2 year olds	4	1,418 lbs.	2,003 lbs.	7.0
3 year olds	8	1,928 lbs.	2,344 lbs.	6.4