

Keep Your Bull at Home

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There is nothing more serious in the cattle business than buying a bull. Much time is spent evaluating available information, such as performance data and pedigree, to assure that the right bull is brought home.

Not everyone will use the right information (a personal bias), but when the gavel strikes the podium, the bull has a new owner and home. The process essentially has bonded the bull to the new operation. There is always the need to look over the fence as the bull settles into the new surroundings.

With the increasing size of the beef cowherds, multiple purchases are common for more operations. With reasonable cull prices, (local sale results show bulls weighing a ton netting more than \$1,500 in the sale ring), a very real option is to sell marginal bulls and replace them with improved sires. This leads to serious bull sorting and buying and the ultimate end point, bull turnout.

For most beef operations, bull turnout is in progress or soon to begin. Trailing or hauling cows to pasture is one task that, with today's high fuel prices and equipment expenses, needs to be thought through to minimize trips. Bull turnout is just another reminder of the need to travel and position bulls and cows accordingly.

Bulls and cows simply don't appear in the same pasture. A fairly thought-out process needs to be completed to assure that every animal gets to the proper pasture. The Dickinson Research Extension Center routinely travels 50 miles round trip to deliver bulls to cow pastures. The trip is not going to break the bank, but repeated trips add up.

As bulls are prepared for turnout, breeding soundness exams already should be in hand. Any bull that turned up infertile already should have had the opportunity to visit the local sale barn. In case the infertile bull was kept for a recheck, don't forget to do the recheck and at the same time check for new problems that weren't detected during the earlier breeding soundness exam.

As the bulls start detecting the presence of cows beginning to cycle, keep an eye out for any aggressive fighting that has created some lameness. Lameness and subsequent pain are important to detect because subtle structural unsoundness will not improve in the breeding pen.

Most producers can recall the new bull that never got turned out. Rivalry in the bull pen benched the bull and the dollars invested before delivery to the cow pasture. It is frustrating, but bulls are bulls and even a roughneck takes second seat to bulls that have a focused intention.

Perhaps a sigh of relief is in order as the bulls walk out of the trailer and greet the cows. The territory is ripe for problems and the need to recheck pastures becomes a routine activity, even with high fuel prices. Structural problems or pain related to injury takes a toll. Reproductive issues, including bulls that injure their penis regardless of the cause, can result in a bull that has no interest in breeding cows. A bull not breeding cows easily will cost \$40 in lost revenue per day.

The bottom line is that monitoring a bull is important. The failure to pick up and replace nonperforming bulls hits the pocketbook. With all the challenges of maintaining an effective, sound and performance orientated bull herd, the end reward is good calves that fit the market.

All the headaches are worth it, unless the worst-case scenario occurs: Upon checking the cows, you find the neighbor's bull is in your pasture.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at 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 on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0303.

