
Beef Production From a Bull's Eye Point Of View

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Driving the countryside in late summer often provides the opportunity to view bulls wandering listlessly from hill to hill. The breeding season is over. All the cows are bred ñ at least all that are going to get bred. The smell of pheromones from cows has been dispersed and replaced with bellowing teenage calves and cranky boss cows challenging anyone who dares take the last bite.

A bull's eye view of breeding cows reveals life isn't always easy: day after day it's the same routine and life is always at the edge. Equipment failure assures a one way ticket and any miscalculation could be fatal. (Glancing over the fence to the brood mares, brings a smile: at least cows don't bite and kick. Leo, the local stallion, is still holding his own. The guest stallion has not fared so well, displaying several nasty cuts across his right shoulder.)

Word was just received that bull 14 fell in the line of duty with a compound fracture to the left hip. Fourteen was just a young yearling bull, in for the first time on the front lines. No one knows, perhaps a gopher hole, unsure footing on the rocks or may be a direct hit from his partner. No one ever said this would be an easy life. The ranch manager found him on the hillside as he took his last breath.

His number is quietly placed along side 86's number back in the barn (86 fell earlier in the season to a stifle injury). The manager knew the trauma of 14's death provided no salvage value. At least 86 filled the freezer.

The final days in the pasture are signaled by the distant rumble of a trailer and smell of saddle horses. Several futile efforts are made at avoiding the separation from the cow herd, but in the end, the bull joins several other bulls in the trailer for the ride to the bull pasture.

Green grass and solitude await the battery, at least once the old territories and pecking orders are reestablished. The young yearlings only need to look at the

older bulls to know their time has not yet come to take the better grazing spots. Yet they joust and next year's pecking order is already being established. Experience has shown that old bulls need their space, at least until the last thoughts of the breeding season have left.

As the ranch manager goes from pasture to pasture picking up bulls, the second to last pasture brings a surprise guest appearance from a visiting bull. Both bulls show some signs of scuffling, but overall, the cow herd was split, two thirds for the guest bull and one third for our own bull.

Thoughts of exposing our cows to a bull with an unknown health status is a concern but there is not much one can do about it anyway. The bulls are loaded and our bull is dropped off in the bull pasture and the guest bull at home were a quick brand check and call to the owner are completed.

We are short five cows. They have to be in the pasture to the south, somewhere in 20 plus square miles of grass. There is plenty of time to find the cows. Today bulls were our concern: the count is right, adjusted for the loss of two.

It's been a tough season, many of the older bulls have been culled, 28 and 74 are the oldest now, born in 1998, the last of their contemporary group. Bulls are a tough investment, but they still remain a key to any successful cattle business.

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 BT0108.

Bull and Cow Roundup at the End of the Breeding Season

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| Bulls | All present |
| Cows | 5 visiting the neighbors |
| Neighbors' bulls visiting | 1 |
| Neighbors' cows visiting | 3 |

