

Bull Examination Is as Important as Cow Reproduction Preparation

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Keeping track of your health is important, and as you get a little older, periodic checkups shift from being voluntary to recommended and eventually mandated. It pays to keep records of not only our surroundings, but also ourselves as well.

For whatever reason, in the male sector of the population, the periodic annual checkup seems to get brushed aside. This procrastination often results in missing early diagnosis of a problem, that in some case can be life threatening.

The annual checkup is important for humansí overall well being and stamina and a thorough examination is required. The reproductive tract seems to be particularly prone to malfunctioning.

The same evaluation needs to be applied to all living things, including animals in the beef production world. It's interesting that the same attitude prevalent in the male sector of the producer world is carried over into the male sector of the production world.

When was the last time you heard a bull get blamed for an open cow? Rather than "How many cows didn't settle?" should it be "How many cows did the bull miss?" How many meetings do producers go to make sure cows are cycling? A great deal of time and effort is spent to make sure cowsí reproductive systems are healthy and functioning.

Not only are cows thoroughly discussed, but producers set about plotting to interfere with the natural cycles to improve what nature has spent thousands of years developing. Most producers could quote a rhyme with Ovsynch, Co-Synch, Presynch and Heat Synch, as well as, the ration required to make sure the cows are cycling.

The old saying, "it takes two to tangle" is true. When you stop to think of some of the logic used in the business, a cow is expected to settle 100 percent of the time, and yet a bull remains in the herd while only getting about 50 percent of the cows settled the first cycle. (The CHAPS five year rolling average is 58.4 percent of the cows conceived on the first 21 days of the breeding season.)

What is a typical producer response? "I need to get more cows cycling so the bull can get them bred." Perhaps

an alternative response would be, "I need to find a bull that can get all the cycling cows bred."

Awareness and expectation of bull fertility needs to be increased. This week, the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center is busy evaluating bulls. The bulls have had adequate nutrition, but age takes its toll and some bulls are incapable of a vigorous breeding schedule.

Structural problems and injuries created by the day to day jostling are evident. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the typical couch potato. These bulls are over-pampered and over-fed and lack the physical conditioning or desire to get the job done when turned out with a group of cycling cows.

A lot of effort is wasted on good cow management, when bull management is lacking or non existent.

Bulls need to be in physical condition to met the rigors of an active reproductive life. Exercise doesn't hurt. A thorough breeding exam is still required, even in the healthiest-appearing male. The exam should include physical evaluation of body condition, feet and legs, eyes and any indication of illness. A rectal examination for evaluation of the prostate and other internal reproductive organs, plus an external examination of the testes, scrotum, penis and prepuce is required. A semen evaluation based on volume, color, motility and morphology should conclude the breeding soundness exam.

All these evaluations need to be done now, one to two months prior to bull turn out to not only acquire the needed replacements but also to correct needed deficiencies in the existing bull pen. The last evaluation is done at bull turnout when you should observe bulls for mating desire.

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 BT0139.

Breeding Soundness Evaluation of Bulls

Physical Examination

- Feet and legs
- Eyes
- Body condition
- Indications of illness

Rectal Examination

- Prostate
- Seminal vesicles
- Ampullae
- Internal inguinal rings

External Examination

- Testes
- Scrotum
- Penis
- Prepuce

Semen Evaluation

- Volume
- Color
- Motility
- Morphology

Mating Desire

- Present