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BeefTalk: A New Year Means a New Bull

New beef industry changes are on the horizon, so now is a good time to let go of those old bulls.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

The perfect New Year's present could be a new bull.

There will be hundreds of bulls to pick from once the bull-selling season begins.

Each year brings thoughts of newness. There will be new inspirations, desires, and letting go of the old and on with the new. New beef industry changes are on the horizon, so now is a good time to let go of those old bulls and open the doors to new genetics offered among the 2009 bull prospects.

Images

Typical Bull Feed Costs

- Assumption:**
- Bulls breed cows for 60 days and recuperate for 300 days
 - A 2000 pound bull will easily consume 35 pounds and more of hay (or pasture equivalent) a day
 - The last invoice for hay arrived the other day, and at \$105 a ton, or \$0.0525 a pound
 - The daily feed charge is \$1.84 (35 pounds times \$0.0525)
 - If one does the math, the feed cost alone is over \$560 for bull recuperation
- The bottom line:**
- Only keep the good ones!

BeefTalk Graphic

nd state fair



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Ideally, this evaluation should take place each fall. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the “benched” bulls are moved out to open slots for new bulls.

There is the option to carry over an older bull, but breeding cows on pasture is demanding. A slight limp may become a major fault in next year's breeding pastures, increasing the potential for new injuries and cows that do not get bred.

Bulls do need to be part of a breeding herd and having a bull for three years is not out of line. However, some bulls don't make it and need to be moved out.

There are some inherent problems in keeping older, more mature bulls. Their body weight has increased substantially and often their attitude changes.

Older bulls start viewing their owners as herd mates and can become dangerous. For all mature bulls, a producer should evaluate structure and body condition thoroughly and conduct an early breeding soundness exam.

Some of those old bulls don't seem so big until they are squeezed into a working chute. They simply keep walking because their neck girth is as wide as their shoulders, which makes them very difficult to squeeze into a working chute.

That is not true of all bulls. There always are

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certain bulls that deserve to be kept longer, but a semen tank is a good pen for old bulls.

There should be an opportunity to shop for at least one new bull each year.

The economics of keeping a bull also must be considered. If a bull actively breeds cows for only 60 days, then more than 300 days are spent recuperating or getting ready for the next breeding season. A 2,000-pound bull can consume 35 pounds or more of hay (or pasture equivalent) a day. At the DREC, the last invoice for hay arrived the other day.

At \$105 a ton, or \$.0525 a pound, the daily feed charge is \$1.84 (35 pounds times \$.0525). This means the feed costs are more than \$560 to maintain a bull for the 305 days the bull is not breeding. To repeat, the feed costs to maintain the bull are more than \$560 per year.

Bulls need better than a bottom line maintenance survival protocol. A bull that comes out of the winter thin, depleted and rough is not a bull that is ready to breed cows in June.

In the end, extra hay costs (150 to 300 pounds) are added to the \$560. It is important to allow for a daily gain of .5 to 1 pound. This allows the bull to meet his more normal growth curve that eventually will see the bull weight more than 2,500 pounds.

Bulls slowly can grow to the point that they are

too heavy to be an effective breeding bull. The challenge is to have healthy, active bulls, not thin, underfed bulls waiting for survival rations.

No one denies the cost of keeping a bull. Good managers run the numbers and make sure they are putting the costs into good bulls, not marginal bulls.

However, there is hope and the bull catalogs will be arriving soon.

The catalogs are almost mandatory reading. Check them out and begin your shopping. It won't be long before there will be a bull sale every day of the week.

So what makes a good bull? Let's talk about that next time.

May you find all your ear tags.



Your comments are always welcome at

 <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to

 <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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Attachments



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