

you are here: [home](#) → [columns](#) → [beef talk](#) → [beef talk: are you feeding and keeping an eye on the bulls?](#)

### navigation

#### Links

- [News Home](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Archives](#)

#### Feeds

- All News [RSS](#)
- BeefTalk [RSS](#)
- Dairy Focus [RSS](#)
- Prairie Fare [RSS](#)
- Economics [RSS](#)
- Renewable Accounts [RSS](#)
- Small-business Savvy [RSS](#)

#### Twitter

- On Twitter follow [NDSU Ag News](#)

## BeefTalk: Are You Feeding and Keeping an Eye on the Bulls?

**Bulls that are underconditioned, overconditioned, underweight and lackluster need to be dealt with now.**

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Sometimes beef producers overlook the obvious: bulls.

If the bulls are not in a separate pen, now is the time to separate them from the cow herd and take a good look at their condition.

Bulls actually enjoy a solitary life, absent from all the comings and goings in the cow herd. Bulls in a bullpen are much easier to monitor and watch while feeding, lest one of them decides to challenge you at the feed bunk.

### Images

#### How Much Should a Bull Weigh?

Some guidelines for maintaining bulls at mature weight with zero weight gain when feeding unspoil green hay that has a 7% protein value and 46% total digestible nutrients (TDN)

Expected Mature Weight	Daily Dry Matter Intake
1,700	33 pounds
2,000	37 pounds
2,300	45 pounds

Oklahoma State University publication "Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle" written by David Lalman

How Much Should a Bull Weigh?

### nd state fair



#### [4-H State Fair Results](#)

### columns

**[Spotlight on Economics: Spotlight on Economics: Supporting a Nonresident Workforce](#)** (2016-03-16) Supporting the oil and gas industry workforce with a different mix of goods and services can be challenging. [FULL STORY](#)

**[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Are You Feeding and Keeping an Eye on the Bulls?](#)** (2016-03-31) Bulls that are underconditioned, overconditioned, underweight and lackluster need to be dealt with now. [FULL STORY](#)

**[Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Ease Up on the Salt](#)** (2016-03-31) Most of the sodium in our diet comes from processed dinner

Bull docility often is mentioned as a critical talking point when bulls are bought, but it's often simply accepted once they are unloaded at home. Never trust a bull! That is a story in itself, but the point today is the current bull inventory and the condition of the bulls.

Are the bulls in shape for breeding? Once the bulls are turned out to pasture, you have no opportunity to fix a problem. Every time a bull fails to settle a cow, more than 50 pounds of production is lost, never to reach the pocketbook. Simply put, if a cow does not get bred when she expresses estrus the first time and conceives to the next ovulation 21 days later, and the benchmark for summer average daily gain is 2.5 pounds per day, then those 21 days of lost gain are a loss of more than 50 pounds.

Bulls that are underconditioned, overconditioned, underweight and lackluster need to be dealt with now. The penalty is low fertility and open cows.

Bull functionality is best gauged by simply monitoring body condition. Bull conditioning is a fine line between improving body condition without adding fat, in other words "getting in shape," which is a balance of activity and proper nutrition.

The challenge is preparing bulls to go from a relatively docile, frisky life of sitting in a pen, eating, to breeding several cows upon turnout with no warmup period. The key to meeting the

in our diet comes from processed dinner mixes, snacks, canned soups and condiments. [FULL STORY](#)

### **[Small-business Savvy: Small-business Savvy: Understanding Marketing vs. Branding](#)** (2016-03-31)

Branding is a strategy that builds a relationship with customers. [FULL STORY](#)

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nutritional requirements of bulls is to know their mature weight because bulls continue to grow throughout their breeding years, most likely up to 5 years of age.

Essentially, the bulls need to consume just less than 2 percent of their body weight to hold even while consuming good hay that is at least green. Just to maintain weight, a:

- 1,700-pound bull needs a daily intake of 33 pounds of dry matter that is 7 percent protein and 46 percent total digestible nutrients (TDN)
- 2,000-pound mature bull needs a daily intake of 37 pounds of dry matter that is 7 percent protein and 46 percent TDN
- 2,300-pound mature bull needs a daily intake of 45 pounds of dry matter that is 7 percent protein and 46 percent TDN

If the bull's body condition has slipped, improving the forage quality to 50 percent TDN and increasing the intake by 3 pounds for the lighter bulls and 2 pounds for the 2,300-pound bulls should put on 0.5 pound of gain per day.

The key is adequate forage intake. By feeding better-quality hay, bulls should pick up in condition.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center overwinters bulls. Historically, the 2 1/2-year-old bulls have averaged 1,650 to 1,850 pounds in the

fall. The 1 1/2-year-old bulls have weighed in at around 1,350 pounds, all with a good condition score of 5 to 7.

Reviewing the center bulls through the years - and I must admit to some fudging - the bulls at the center have gained approximately 300 pounds per year of life. A 1,300-pound yearling bull would be expected to weigh 1,600 pounds as a 2-year-old, 1,900 pounds as a 3-year-old, 2,200 pounds as a 4-year-old and 2,500 pounds as a 5-year-old.

The center focuses nutritional inputs for bulls with a mature weight of 2,000 to 2,300 pounds.

Experience would say that bulls should be gaining muscle throughout the year, which means between 0.5 and 1 pound a day of gain in body weight to maintain good shape without excessive condition.

For many, bulls are not weighed. Bulls are hard on equipment and, in some cases, will not even fit on the scale. Width, neck muscle and shear strength are good indicators that perhaps the bulls should just be left in the pen. So from a practical aspect, body condition and general luster will tell a lot as well.

Although the exact body weight may not be known, bulls all should be condition score 5 or better. So project a reasonable weight and feed accordingly. Good grass hay goes a long way, but remember, nutrition is more than energy and

protein. Consult your nutritionist for input on a complete supplement to ensure maximum bull fertility.

Money invested in a good bull does little for the operation if the bull cannot keep up with the cows. And while one looks at the bulls, do not forget the cows because they, too, should be in that 5 to 6 condition score and have some brightness to them as they await the bull.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; (701) 456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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source:	Kris Ringwall, (701) 456-1103, <a href="mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu">✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu</a>
editor:	Ellen Crawford, (701) 231-5391, <a href="mailto:ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu">✉ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu</a>

#### Attachments



[PDF - How Much Should a Bull Weigh?](#)



(NDSU\_Extension\_Service\_BeefTalk\_033116.pdf -  
19.30 Kb)



## EPS - How Much Should a Bull Weigh?

(NDSU\_Extension\_Service\_BeefTalk\_033116.eps -  
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