



## BeefTalk 661: Keep an Eye on the Bulls Because They Don't Get a Day Off

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS



*Missed breeding opportunities are expensive because the next opportunity only comes around again in three weeks.*

Although spring seems to be taking a long time getting here, once it does, time will fly. In the rush, don't forget to keep an eye on the bulls.

Every time a bull fails to settle a cow in heat, the result is more than 50 pounds of unsaleable beef, which is beef that never will reach the pocketbook. The typical benchmark average gain for calf growth is 2.5 pounds per day, according to producers who are enrolled in the CHAPS program through the NDSU Extension Service.

Missed breeding opportunities are expensive because the next opportunity only comes around again in three weeks. Bulls need to have structural soundness and physical stamina to breed and conceive calves on a daily basis throughout the

breeding season. No excuses need be made for questionable bulls.

Bulls that are getting older or stiffer, or don't move as well probably are ready for the market. The Dickinson Research Extension Center marketed bulls at more than \$1 per pound, which gave the center some opportunity to buy some younger bulls.

Bulls can breed a lot of cows, but there are those that just don't get the job done. What's the difference? Not easy to tell because breeding soundness exams generally only determine adequate reproductive function and the ability to produce sperm. The ability to breed can be somewhat observed by evaluation of structure, but that still leaves stamina and desire unevaluated.

Bulls do differ in their willingness to breed. Underconditioned or overconditioned bulls or underweight, lackluster bulls need to be dealt with now. Don't wait because the penalty is low fertility, which means open cows.

Although there are no quick fixes, bull fitness is a function of total body condition and perhaps is best gauged simply by monitoring the bull. Bull conditioning needs to be a fine line between improving body condition but not adding fat. Some



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would call that getting physically fit. Keep in mind that the balance between bull activity and nutrition is important.

The challenge is that bulls go from a relatively docile but frisky life and sitting in a pen eating to the expectation of breeding several cows that are in heat with no warmup period. Giving bulls some room and getting them accustomed to grass certainly is beneficial for keeping bulls in shape.

Again, there is no quick fix to poor bull fertility, so don't create the problem. Spermatogenesis is roughly a two-month process from start to finish. Viable, aggressive sperm cells are not produced overnight. If bulls are stressed, underfed or sick, spermatogenesis can be disrupted or may cease, resulting in low-fertility bulls later in the breeding season.

A keen observation of bulls two months prior to turnout is critical. One cannot emphasize enough that monitoring the bulls is an ongoing process. If breeding soundness exams have not been done, get them scheduled. Weight and condition scoring also needs to be done.

With a keen eye for adequate body condition and an expectation that most bulls can add 300 pounds a year in muscle, the bulls should be on target for the next breeding season.

Bulls that are struggling with conditioning or simply not putting on weight may be subfertile. Unfortunately, some bulls actually will outgrow their capacity to breed because of muscle, not just overconditioning. Generally, these bulls also become rather hard on equipment and facilities, so they find themselves in the market pen. At \$1 per pound, sell them.

Another issue is penning or segregating the bulls so that they know who is going to be in the same pasture. It is best not to mix unfamiliar bulls at breeding time. They will settle their differences, but why have them snorting at or hurting each other when they should be breeding cows?

Come to understand who the dominant bulls are and how the bulls interact in the breeding pasture. With the advent of better methods to trace sires of calves, it is not unusual to find out that, in a pasture with three bulls, one bull bred almost all the cows.

The bottom line is that bull management is a balance between science and art. Balancing the rate of gain, muscle growth, fat deposition and bull personality ultimately determines how one efficiently uses a bull.

The reason one buys a bull is to pass on the genetic traits one wants from the bull. There is nothing worse than buying a genetically superior bull only to find him lame. Once purchased and evaluated, keep an eye on those bulls because even one day off costs money.

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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