

You may have heard it said that a bull is 50% responsible for the calf crop in a cow-calf operation, as he splits responsibility 50-50 with the cow to produce a calf. However, often only one bull is used to breed many cows, thus we believe that he carries a much greater responsibility than just 50%. For example, if you have just one bull on 25 cows and they are all open at the end of breeding season it is very likely that the bull is 100% responsible. Because the bull has such high expectations placed on him to successfully settle a specific number of cows in a certain period of time, it is wise to invest in that animal and ensure that he is in premium condition prior to and for the duration of the breeding season. For the next couple of weeks we will discuss bull fertility. We will talk about things that affect bull fertility, explain why bulls should be fertility tested each year, and discuss things to look for in the bull during breeding season that might pose a threat to his fertility.

The first factor affecting a bull's ability to settle cows greatly depends on his structural soundness. Because he is expected to be so active, it may be wise to view the bull as an athlete. With this in mind you should check your bull regularly for any injuries or lameness. This can often be detected by simply watching the bull travel in the pasture. Some of the most common injuries in bulls are in their feet, legs, or back. Watch the bulls for any swelling in his joints, limping, and/or stiffness. Any of these things may prove to be problematic and hinder the bull's ability to successfully mount and service females. This may lead to temporary or even permanent removal of the bull from your breeding plan. Many injuries can be treated if they are detected in a timely manner, but failure to do so may lead to temporary or even permanent removal of the bull from your breeding plan.

The second factor a producer should keep in mind is the bull's libido. This is defined as the behavioral drive that is associated with the bull's desire to breed a cow. Detection of this, or lack thereof, is only possible if the producer monitors his cattle and takes note of if/when he sees the bull breeding the cows. Bulls with no libido likely have no visible physical issues, and have satisfactory semen quality. This is one reason that a fertility test alone cannot be a good judge of whether or not a bull will breed a cow. He may have high quality semen, but if he has no libido, the cows will not be bred.

One of the best things a producer can do is to watch the bull to see that he is structurally sound, and can physically mount and service the cows. Further, the bull should not only be capable of mounting the females to service them, but he should express a desire to do so. With regular and thorough observation of your bull during breeding season you can better know if he is in good physical condition and taking care of his job from a physical standpoint. Next week we will talk about how the health and nutrition of the bull can largely impact his fertility.

Prices for feeder steers medium and large 1 sold through the Oklahoma National Stockyards on Tuesday, February 10, 2015 are as follows: 458lb- \$306.83, 571lb- \$267.06, 676lb- \$222.85, and 773lb- \$204.81. The price for March 2015 750lb feeder steers on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange was \$201.9 on closing Tuesday, February 10, 2015.

Thanks,  
Dr. Jesse Richardson

Henderson County Veterinary Hospital  
903-675-5613  
hcvethospital.com  
hcvethosp@me.com