

In the midst of feeding hay and adjusting to the ever changing weather, we encourage you to remember that breeding season is just around the corner. Though breeding season does not begin until this spring, steps should be taken now to prepare the bull for breeding. This week we will discuss some management steps that can be taken to best ensure that the bull will be ready to breed cows and your calf crop percentage will be as high as possible.

Three key areas to focus on when preparing your bull for breeding are his health, physical appearance, and reproductive ability. It is very important that the bull be vaccinated with a respiratory vaccine with leptospirosis prior to breeding season. A MultiMin injection should also be given to help prevent deficiencies in microminerals, which can cause infertility in bulls. The bulls should also be dewormed and deloused. Using these vaccinations and parasite protection will help prevent common illnesses.

Physical appearance of the bull is also very important to take into account. Is the bull sound on his feet and legs? Are there any cracks or corns in his feet? It is wise to thoroughly examine the bull's feet, legs, and overall structure as any issue will likely hinder the bull's ability to travel to and mount cows. His body condition is equally important. Because bulls tend to lose weight during breeding season, a bull with a BCS of 4 ½ or less should not be used to breed cows. Ideal BCS is 5 or 6, so if your bull is not in this range you should use the next couple of months to add condition to him before he is turned out on the cows.

Perhaps the most important area to focus on is the bull's reproductive ability, which can be evaluated in a breeding soundness evaluation (BSE) performed by a veterinarian. A BSE consists of a physical examination of the bull, scrotal circumference measurement, and a semen evaluation for sperm shape and movement, which determines the fertility of the bull. A bull should not be turned out on cows to breed unless he has been determined to be a satisfactory breeder.

Because cattle prices are rising, and are expected to continue to rise, it is economically beneficial to have a calf crop that is as close to 100% as possible. Don't compromise the calf crop percentage by assuming that your bull is fertile. Rather, take these bull management steps to help increase the calf crop percentage, which will in turn increase the income you receive. If you have any questions about pre-breeding management of your herd, please contact us.

Thanks,

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