

Imagine for a moment that a producer purchases a bull to use on his cow herd. The breeding season lasts three months, and then the bull is separated from the cows. When the calving season ends, the producer calculates that less than 65% of his cows have calves. The cows had been well vaccinated and were managed well, so the producer is left frustrated and unsure what the problem is. Unfortunately, this same scenario has become a harsh reality for some cattle producers, but it doesn't have to happen to you, too.

The first mistake that the producer made when he purchased the bull is he assumed that the bull was fertile. Bulls should be fertility tested within 6 weeks of being turned out on the cows. A common misconception about bull fertility is that young, virgin bulls are fertile. This is not always true. Rather, a fertility test should be done on all breeding age bulls that are intended for your herd regardless of whether or not they are virgins. Further, fertility cannot be guaranteed from one breeding season to the next, so it is important that the bull be tested before the breeding season begins each year.

The second mistake made by the producer is that he did not have his bull tested for Trichomoniasis, also known as Trich. Trich is a venereal disease that can cause infertility and abortions in cattle. Trich can only enter a herd via infected bulls or females, and transmission of the disease can be from infected bulls to cows, or from infected cows to bulls. Infected cows have been known to cleanse themselves of the disease after several heat cycles, but there is no treatment known for infected bulls. There are no outward signs of Trich in males, and the only sign of the disease in females is pregnancy loss. Therefore, to prevent Trich from entering your herd, bulls should be tested before they are turned out on the cows for breeding.

Trich and bull infertility have the ability to make holes below the waterline, and quickly sink operations. The cost to have a bull tested for these things is minimal compared to the amount of income that may be lost with the decreased calf crop percentage. We encourage you to continue to think about decisions that may put or prevent holes below the waterline. Remember to ask yourself the key questions- What is the upside if events turn out well? What is the downside if events go very badly? Can you *truly* live with the downside? Can you prove your actions are safe?

For the next several weeks we will track feeder steer prices through Superior Livestock Auction and the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Prices for feeder steers through Superior from Friday, September 26, 2014 are as follows: 450lb- \$319cwt, 550lb- \$250cwt, 650lb- \$245cwt, and 750lb- \$225cwt. The price for October 2014 750lb feeder steers on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange was \$233cwt on closing Friday, September 26, 2014.

If you have any questions about this week's waterline principle decisions, or the feeder steer prices, please contact us.

Thanks,
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