

14.6 Percent Of Bulls Didn't Make The Grade At Soundness Clinics

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

Bull breeding soundness clinics were held in southwest Missouri during mid-March. The results show that 18 of the 123 bulls (14.6 percent) didn't make a minimum score good enough to qualify as a satisfactory potential breeder.

"This is a higher rate than the average of the last 7 clinics dating back to 2005. That average is 10.3 percent," said Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

The breeding soundness exam is performed by veterinarians and includes semen evaluation, scrotal measurement, accessory sex gland palpation and penile evaluation. Mobility and the feet and leg soundness are also checked. Two aspects of breeding ability not evaluated are li-

- Scrotal circumference ranged from 30 to 50 centimeters. The minimum size for an 18 month old bull is 32 centimeters and 34 cm for 2 years and over.

- The average body condition score was 5.9 with a range from 4.5 to 7.5. A 6 score is a good target for bulls at turnout time.

- 9 bulls had various degrees of eye scars from earlier pinkeye infections however they were not severe enough to impair vision significantly.

- 15 bulls had noticeable hoof problems such as long toes, curved toes or corns.

- 4 mature bulls were tested for trichomoniasis.

In addition to the exams, the bulls were given appropriate pre-breeding vaccinations and treated for internal and external parasites.



Dr. Mike Bloss at microscope checks a semen sample for motility and percent normal sperm.

Photo credit: Southwest Region News Service

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actual servicing of a cow.

"The primary reason for bulls failing this spring was a low percentage of normal sperm," said Cole. "One part of the criteria requires a 70 percent or greater normal sperm count. Twelve of the 18 bulls not making the cut had sperm counts below 70 percent. Some fell as low as 10 percent. Thirty-eight bulls out of the 123 had normal counts of 90 percent and above."

According to Cole, these clinics usually don't find a large number of bulls that are sterile, but they locate bulls with marginal problems that often lead to strung out calving seasons.

Other items of interest relating to the clinics in southwest Missouri this year include:

- 41 farmers had bulls evaluated.
- 53 percent of the bulls were Angus with 11.5 percent Red Angus.
- 14 different breeds or composites were evaluated.
- The bulls ranged in age from 12 months up to 9 years with an average age of 3.1 years.

Since sperm production is continuous – injury, disease, fever, extreme temperatures and even fescue toxicosis can affect bull fertility.

"Testing ahead of each breeding season is encouraged. Close observation during the breeding season and date checking for cows that fail to breed helps confirm the bull is working," said Cole.

The following veterinarians assisted with the clinics: Drs. Voyd Brown of Cassville, Chuck Dake of Miller, Mike Bloss of Aurora and Randall Spragg of Rogersville. Ed Trotter with Pfizer provided product and Eldon Cole with MU Extension coordinated the clinics.

"The 123 bulls checked represent a very small percentage of the bulls that will be turned with cows in the next two months. Farmers should visit with their own veterinarian about checking their bulls out to give some insurance that their 2011 calf crop will be well-bunched," said Cole.

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