

Excuses Exist For Not Castrating Bulls But Steers Bring More

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

One of the basic, recommended practices on beef cow-calf operations is castration of the bull calves before they are two months of age.

Eldon Cole, livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension, says in spite of the recommendation, an unusually high percentage of male calves still go through the feeder cattle sale ring as bulls.

is castrated and the eating quality of the beef tends to be reduced according to Cole.

An Oklahoma State trial compared the performance of 111 bulls and 204 steers during a 44-day receiving period. The cattle were purchased at various auctions and the bulls were surgically castrated 24 hours after arrival. The bulls weighed 548 pounds and the steers 524 pounds.

During the trial the bulls had higher morbid-



Leaving the bulls intact usually results in a market discount from \$3 or \$4 per hundred up to \$10 to \$12, depending on their weight and current market demand.

“Put another way, the bull calf compared to a steer will bring anywhere from \$40 to \$80 less per head,” said Cole.

Reasons for not castrating the bull calves are varied.

“Some producers leave them as bulls expecting they will gain more while on the cow. Some never learned how to castrate calves and may be a little squeamish around blood. The biggest reason may be a lack of facilities,” said Cole.

However, the longer the calf remains a bull, there is an increased risk of problems when he

ity (42.3 percent vs. 23.4 percent) and higher mortality (11.3 percent vs. 3.9 percent). Medicine costs per head were greater for the bulls, \$12.30 compared to \$2.54 for the steers. The daily gains during the trial favored the steers, 3.63 to 2.97 pounds for the bulls.

The Oklahoma study, according to Cole, shows there may not be that much of an incentive to buy the bulls and upgrade them.

“Failure to castrate before weaning opens up profit opportunities for the backgrounder who buys the bulls at a discount then takes the risk to castrate them. However, most backgrounders admit they’d prefer to buy steers rather than have to clean-up a lot of bull calves or yearling after each purchase,” said Cole. △