

Is The Bull Ready For The Breeding Season?

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The breeding season for late winter-early spring calving cow herds will be getting underway around the first of April. Producers should be sure that the bull is “ready to go” when placed with the females. Before the bull is placed with the cows, his reproductive potential should be evaluated. Breeding Soundness Examinations (BSE) should be done on each bull 45 days before the start of the breeding season. Very few bulls are actually sterile, but a large number have problems that will reduce fertility.

Approximately 11 percent of bulls are either sterile or subfertile between 12 and 14 months of age. About 5 percent of proven sires develop fertility problems between seasons. As bulls age, they are more likely to have problems.

An average of 15 percent of the bulls used are unsatisfactory breeders due to unsoundness in feet, legs and eyes and other problems that would reduce their reproductive potential. A BSE includes an evaluation of the bull’s reproductive tract, semen evaluation and structural soundness.

Condition of bulls is related to reproductive

potential. Mature bulls should be in a body condition score (BCS) of 6 at the onset of the breeding season. Bulls will need this condition to “draw on” as the breeding season progresses. Yearling bulls recently purchased may need to be “let down.” They should be in a BCS no lower than 6. These bulls will quickly lose weight and condition when turned with females. These young bulls will need to be fed extra grain to maintain appropriate condition and continue to grow.

In travels this past month, I have observed a large number of bulls that were in a BCS of 3 and less. These bulls will not produce satisfactory semen and will not have the stamina to get the job done unless they gain in condition. From 80 to 100 pounds of weight gain are required to improve body condition one score. A bull in a BCS of 3 would need to gain 240 to 300 pounds to reach a BCS of 6.

Sperm production takes about two months; so that used on the first day of the breeding season was started about 60 days earlier. This process does not speed up during the breeding season.

A BSE does not provide an indication of the bull’s libido or desire to mate with females. Bulls should be observed in the act of breeding to evaluate libido. Δ

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