

Producers Urged To Check Bull Fertility Levels Before Breeding Season

FAYETTEVILLE, ARK.

Breeding season is right around the corner for spring calving operations. Proper bull management is crucial for a successful breeding season, according to Dr. Jeremy Powell, assistant professor/extension veterinarian with the University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture.

However, according to the 2008 U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS), only 27 percent of beef cattle operations annually test bulls before turning them out for the breeding season.

"Bulls can differ in their reproductive capabilities, and research studies show that one in five bulls that undergo a breeding soundness evaluation aren't satisfactory breeders," says Powell.

"Obviously, results from using an infertile bull can be disappointing," he said. "You can't afford to use a bull that isn't a satisfactory potential breeder," Powell said.

The risk of experiencing problems with bull fertility can be minimized through the use of a breeding soundness evaluation (BSE).

A BSE is a practical method to identify bulls with less than satisfactory breeding potential.

This evaluation should be conducted on every bull at least 30 days before each breeding season to allow enough time for replacement of deferred or unsatisfactory bulls.

The first step in a BSE is to select a veterinarian in your area who is competent in conducting a complete BSE.

The BSE includes an evaluation of the bull's physical ability to successfully mate. Both internal and external portions of the reproductive tract are examined or palpated for abnormalities. A measurement of scrotal circumference is included as an indicator of the production of high-quality sperm. A semen sample is also evaluated.

Bulls still need to be observed during the breeding season for normal libido, but a breeding soundness exam prior to turn out will greatly reduce risks associated with infertile bulls, according to Powell.

For more information on determining fertility of bulls, contact your county extension agent or see a U of A fact sheet at www.uaex.edu/Other_Areas/publications/PDF/FSA-3046.pdf. Δ