



BULL MANAGEMENT IS RISK MANAGEMENT

FACT SHEET

Why is good bull management important?

A successful mating is the product of both female and male fertility, yet male fertility is often overlooked and a disproportionate emphasis placed on female fertility as a driver of overall pregnancy rates, production and profit. Good bull management is about risk management; good bull management prior to and during the joining period can help to reduce the risk of production and profit losses associated with poor fertility that are often not noticed until pregnancy diagnosis or calving. Identifying bull problems early will allow remedial action to be taken to minimise production losses.

Key steps to good bull management

Prior to joining

- Select bulls intended for joining, purchase new bulls and determine the number of bulls required.
- The number of bulls required will be influenced by the bull to cow ratio. Recommended ratios are between 1:40 and 1:60 bulls per cow provided the bulls have been classed as 'satisfactory' in a Breeding Soundness Evaluation (BSE).
- Consider that not all bulls may be fit for breeding and bull break downs may occur during the joining period; additional bulls may be required to cover such eventualities.
- If females are oestrous synchronised, higher bull: cow ratios (typically 1:25) will be required as a greater proportion of females will be in oestrous simultaneously, increasing the bull work load in a condensed period of time.
- If groups of young or virgin bulls are used (1-2 years of age), higher bull: cow ratios are required as younger bulls have smaller testicles and therefore smaller semen reserves.
- Ensure that all bulls intended for use are vaccinated (including vibrio), treated for parasites and free of disease prior to the scheduled commencement of joining. This is particularly important when newly purchased bulls have been acquired as these animals may carry diseases (such as pestivirus) that can affect fertility and calving rate into the herd. New bulls should be quarantined (until pestivirus status determined) and acclimatised prior to use.
- Ensure bulls are in good condition (3/5) prior to joining as bulls will lose condition during the joining period. Excessive condition (>3/5) can reduce the bull's ability to mate effectively.
- Ensure all bulls intended to be used undergo a breeding soundness evaluation (BSE); this is aimed at identifying bulls that meet the minimum standards for fertility and identifying those that are sub fertile. This typically involves a general physical and reproductive examination, assessment of scrotal circumference and serving ability. Semen analysis may also be included if it is warranted.
- Single versus multi-sire joinings:
- Single sire matings carry the associated risk that if the bull becomes sub fertile during the joining period, no other bull is available to compensate.



- Multi-sire groups have the advantage that if one bull should fail, other bulls can compensate and minimise the impact on pregnancy rates.
- Multi-sire joining and rotation of bulls is recommended to reduce the impact of the presence of a sub-fertile bull.
- Aim for a compact joining period: 8 weeks is recommended for the cows and first calvers (2nd joining). This ensures an even calf crop and facilitates selection of replacement heifers; potentially valuable heifers won't be culled based on their age and size only. Heifer joining should occur over 6 weeks and commence before the cow herd. This is to increase selection pressure on heifers for fertility and to improve the 1st calver (2nd joining) pregnancy rate as they will have more opportunity to become pregnant.

During joining

This aspect of bull management is frequently overlooked. Monitor all bulls closely for any signs of injury or other conditions that could affect his fertility or serving ability; observe bulls from a distance to ensure that the bulls can and are mating effectively. If a problem is detected, the opportunity exists to replace the problem bull, minimising production losses.

- Common problems occurring during the joining period include lameness and prepuce or penile injuries.
- Consider that young bulls are more likely to become injured and sub fertile due to their inexperienced mating ability and high libido.
- Bulls can be utilised on a rotational basis to reduce the risk of one mob having low conception rates due to poor bull performance; rotating the bulls through the female groups provides the opportunity for more fertile bulls to compensate for the poor performance of another within a particular group.

To arrange a bull breeding soundness evaluation for your herd, to discuss any concerns about the performance of your bulls or to discuss any of the above recommendations, contact the Holbrook Veterinary Centre (60 362374)

For more information about pregnancy testing feel free to contact one of the vets at HVC on (02) 60362374.