

Bull Management



Among the many components required for optimum reproductive performance of the dairy herd is proper bull management. Bulls are required to successfully inseminate cows following the completion of artificial breeding (AB) so that the pregnancy rates for the herd reach the expected targets. Improper management of bulls can result in poor pregnancy rates and the introduction of disease to a herd.

BULL SELECTION

There are several factors to keep in mind when selecting bulls, including age, size, body condition, breed, disease status, general health and finally the number of bulls that are required.

Bulls used for mating should be a minimum of 15 months of age and no greater than four years. Virgin bulls are ideal as this reduces the likelihood of them introducing sexually transmitted diseases into the herd.

Before purchasing or leasing the bulls ensure they have been certified free of Tb, Bovine Viral Disease (BVD) and Enzootic Bovine Leucosis (EBL). The bulls should also have been fully vaccinated for leptospirosis and BVD prior to arriving onto the dairy platform.

Soundness exam

When selecting bulls a soundness exam can be undertaken to help identify animals that are sub fertile, infertile or have physical abnormalities that prevent successful mounting and penetration.

A soundness exam should ideally be undertaken at least a month before the bulls are needed.

The soundness exam begins at a distance assessing size relative to age, body condition, locomotion and noting signs that might be consistent with presence of infectious disease.

A more detailed exam may then be required of areas of the bull, in particular the legs, feet and reproductive tract.

Examination of the reproductive tract involves ensuring the penis is freely moveable within the prepuce and there is no evidence of abnormalities. The testes will be examined for size and any evidence of abnormalities.

Semen can be collected and examined for volume, density, sperm motility and the number of abnormal or damaged sperm.



It is also possible to undertake libido or service testing. This is where the ability of the bull to serve correctly is assessed.



On farm management

When bulls arrive on farm it is important to examine them to ensure there have been no injuries during transport. Monitor for any bulls that are overly aggressive and if present consider getting rid of them as they may be a liability on farm.

The bulls should be divided into two teams - one team will be with the cows while the other team is being rested. Changing the teams over every 2-3 days ensures bulls are adequately rested. Check on the bulls daily for lameness, sickness and observe that they are serving the cows properly while they are in with the herd.

Any lame or sick bulls should be removed from the herd straight away and replaced. Ideally bulls shouldn't be brought into the yard or shed as this increases the chances of lameness.

Ideally bulls are draughted out of the herd in the paddock and move them onto the next paddock while the cows are being milked.

Bull power

Correct bull numbers are crucial to ensure ratios are sufficient to serve all the cows not pregnant to AB. The number required will depend on the number of cows being milked, the length of AB and the percentage of cows likely to be pregnant when AB is finished.

The basic rule of thumb is that one bull is required for every 30 cows that need to be mated. This figure will need to be doubled if two teams are being

run, as well as additional bulls to cover any lame or sick animals.

As mating progresses fewer bulls will be required in the herd, but always ensure there are at least two at any time. If a synchrony program has been used during AB, then twice the number of bulls will be required in the herd around the time the cows come back onto heat. Alternatively the AB technician can revisit the farm around this time.



For more information contact your local XLVets practice:



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