

With breeding season quickly approaching, there is no better time to prepare your bull for breeding than right now. In the two months before breeding season is scheduled to occur, four specific things should be done to ensure the bull is performing at his best once breeding season arrives.

Bulls should be evaluated for their body condition score (BCS) throughout the year, but especially just before breeding season begins. A BCS of 5 or 6 is ideal for bulls that are soon to be turned out with the cows for breeding. Because bulls tend to lose weight and condition during breeding season, a bull with a BCS less than 4 ½ should not be used to breed cows. Evaluating the bulls 60 days before breeding begins will allow ample time for feeding alterations to occur so that the bull may gain or lose condition in order for him to meet the goal of BCS 5 or 6.

A breeding soundness evaluation (BSE) should also be done on each bull that will be used for breeding. This is a tool that aides in deciding if a bull will be a satisfactory potential breeder. The evaluation involves a physical exam of the bull, scrotal circumference measurement, and semen evaluation for sperm shape and movement, which determines the fertility of the bull. The bull should successfully pass the BSE before he is turned out to breed cows.

Vaccination of the bulls prior to breeding is also important and beneficial. Vaccines such as a blackleg, MultiMin, a respiratory virus and leptospirosis, and a dewormer/deliver application should be used. This will aide in keeping the bull as healthy as possible during the breeding season.

One of the most important factors to consider before turning a bull out is his soundness. His feet, legs, and overall structure should be carefully evaluated, as any cracks or corns in the feet may lead to potential soundness issues. Because the bull will be travelling and mounting cows on a regular basis, the condition of his feet and structure is extremely important.

When determining how many bulls should be used on a herd of cows, there are some simple rules of thumb that may be followed. An 18 month old bull should be able to successfully breed 15-20 cows, and bulls 2 years old or older should be able to breed 25-30 cows. This may be used as a guideline to ensure that the bull is not being worked beyond his physical capabilities.

For more information regarding pre-breeding management of bulls, please contact us.