

Bull Testing

It Pays to Test Your Bulls.

Fertility is the most important economical trait to a cow-calf and dairy producer. When considering the one bull to 10,000 cow ratio of an AI sire, or the one bull to 25 cow ratio of the herd sire, fertility is obviously much more important in the bull than in any individual cow. Bull evaluation is an essential component of a herd management program, and is essential if you wish to maximize your return from your cow herd.

It is estimated that one bull out of five, from a random population, will not be a good breeding animal. Therefore, a breeding evaluation is an effective and reliable way to see poor potential breeders and make it easier to cull and replace before the breeding season begins. The causes of poor performance are varied and can include poor semen quality, physical defects, or lack of libido (sex drive).

A breeding soundness evaluation consists of a general physical examination, examination of the reproductive organs, and an evaluation of the semen. The bull must pass all three parts to be classified as a satisfactory breeding animal.

A rectal exam is the method for checking internal reproductive organs. That is done in order to find any abnormalities. The circumference of the scrotum is measured because testicular size is directly related to sperm production and fertility. A semen sample is collected by electroejaculation with a rectal probe. The motility of the sperm is assessed and scored. The semen is diluted and stained to allow for examination of individual sperm structure.

The bulls' final status in the evaluation depends on how well he has scored in those categories. Veterinarians will classify a bull as satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or will defer the classification. Standard forms and techniques ensure consistency in bull evaluation. Occasionally, it may be difficult to evaluate the potential breeding soundness of a bull on a particular day. In these cases, the veterinarian may recommend re-testing at a later date.

Libido or mating ability is an important yet sometimes difficult component of breeding soundness to evaluate. Owners are encouraged to assess this at home on the first few breedings that a bull attempts. Any physical defect or libido problems that prevent successful breeding will override a satisfactory breeder classification. Regardless of the quality or quantity of the semen, the bull must be able to complete the act of breeding to be a good herd sire. This is especially important in young dairy bulls where higher incidences of these problems are common.

Facilities for semen evaluation should be strong, and securely confine bulls. In order to prevent slipping, good footing is important. The veterinarian will require access to the underside of the bull for collecting semen. Ambient temperature should be above 50F to prevent cold shock to the semen and erroneous readings of scrotal circumference.

The cost of bull evaluation is small when compared to the cost of keeping unbred cows, having an extended calving interval, and running extra bulls. An appointment needs to be scheduled in advance for bull evaluation.

Breeding soundness evaluations of bulls should be an essential part of the breeding program. Your bull counts for half of the breeding potential and traits that you desire in your herd. It pays to test.