

Winter Management of the Herd Bull

The bull is likely to be the most neglected individual in a large number of cow-calf operations. Yet, he can be most important in the reproductive efficiency and profitability of the cow herd. He is expected to mate with and settle cows on

their first heat during a short breeding season. Proper care and management of the bull during the off breeding season is critical to his subsequent performance during the breeding season.

About one-third of Tennessee's cow-

calf producers have a calving season and remove the bull from the cow herd, then maintain him in a lot until the breeding season gets under way the following year. The other two-thirds of producers leave the bull with the herd year-round.

Allowing the bull to run in the herd year-round provides limited opportunity to properly care for and manage him for top performance. Even those bulls that are penned away from the cow herd are often forgotten and receive limited attention.

Several items should be considered for fall and winter management of the herd bull in a spring-breeding program:

- What about the bull's physical condition? Examine the condition of his feet and legs, as well as his eyes. Bulls with physical problems in the fall will probably be worse in the spring, which will limit their reproductive abilities. Bulls must be able to observe cows in heat, cover the pasture and successfully mate with cows on their first heat of the breeding season.
- Bulls must be physically sound for top reproductive efficiency. Bulls with feet and leg problems that cannot be corrected before the breeding season should be culled and replaced.
- Do not contribute to feet and leg problems by penning the bull in an area that does not provide opportunity for adequate exercise. Stamina is important. The bull is an athlete and must be able to maintain physical condition to be ready for the breeding season.

It is important that the herd bull's physical condition be evaluated in the fall in order to make management decisions to be sure he is ready for the breeding season.

- Check out the bull's reproductive organs, both internally and externally, before going into the wintering period. Have a veterinarian determine his reproductive potential before winter feeding expenses occur. Also, if the bull is determined to be not satisfactory, this will provide ample time to purchase a replacement.
- Evaluate the bull's body condition during the fall. If not in the desired condition, there will be ample time to make needed corrections. Bulls should be managed and fed to be in a body condition score (BCS) of 5-6 (on a 9-point scale) at the start of the breeding season. If bulls are in a poor condition, with a BCS of 3-4, they will need to improve 2-3



Allowing the bull to run in the herd year-round provides limited opportunity to properly care for and manage him for top performance. University of Tennessee animal scientist James Neel provides tips on how to care for bulls during the off season. (PHOTO BY CORINNE PATTERSON)

API offers growing list of topic sites

Producers have ready access to information on a growing list of topic-oriented Web sites compiled and hosted by Angus Productions Inc. (API), publisher of the *Angus Journal* and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*. Each topic site is intended to be a portal to information, including *Angus Journal* and *Angus Beef Bulletin* articles; articles by other publications; news releases by academia, government

sources and industry; and links to other Web resources.

Current topic sites include "Angus International," "Beef Cow Efficiency," "Body Condition Scoring," "Country of Origin Labeling," and "Dealing with Drought." These sites are available by clicking the VIP Web sites link at www.angusproductions.com.



scores before initiation of the breeding season. Approximately 100 pounds (lb.) of weight gain will be needed to increase by one BCS. Bulls with a BCS of 3-4 will need to gain 100-300 lb. to be in appropriate condition. This improvement could be easily realized in 2-4 months.

- Do not overfeed and get the bulls too fat. The mating desire, libido, will be reduced if the bull is carrying too much flesh.
- What is the age of the bull? After bulls reach their sixth birthdays, they will have reduced reproductive potential as well as physical problems. Bulls more than 6 years old should be candidates for culling and marketing.

Another item that should be considered is the genetic potential of the bull in relation to the cow herd. Is there a need for genetic improvement? Can improved genetics be purchased? What would be the value of anticipated improved genetics in relation to the cost?

It is important that the herd bull's physical condition be evaluated in the fall in order to make management decisions to be sure he is ready for the breeding season. Bulls with problems should be marketed and replaced. Remember that the bull's reproductive potential is sensitive to the care and management provided.

For additional information on bull management, contact your local Extension office.



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