



technical brief

Managing bulls for high fertility

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Whilst most breeders worry about the chance of buying an infertile bull, the management of your herd bulls generally has a much larger impact on herd fertility than buying the odd dud.

The most common causes of reduced herd reproduction resulting from sub-optimum bull management include;

- **bulls being in too poor condition in the 2-3 months leading up to joining.** This is the critical time for semen production as it takes sperm about 60 days to develop. Poorly conditioned bulls means lowered semen production. Bulls should be between condition score 2 and 3.5 leading up to joining.
- **using too many bulls in joining groups.** This encourages competition and fighting leading to increased injuries. Better to keep a few bulls in reserve rather than put them all with the cows to start with.
- **having mixed age bulls in groups shortly before and/or during mating.** Younger bulls will be dominated by the older bulls and there-for be less effective, as well as having a greater chance of injury.
- If you are going to mix young bulls from different sources, do so at least 3 months before joining is due to start so they have time to work out their social order.
- **over-fat bulls.** Perhaps not much of a problem over the last few years but can be a problem if buying young bulls that have been overfed. Over-fatness interferes with sperm development and survival – overseas research has shown that bulls who have more than 12mm fat at the 12/13th rib during puberty will have reduced sperm production through-out the rest of their life.
- **injury and age related wear and tear.** Your favourite bull might have been fit at the time of purchase, but each season of use exposes him to injury and the onset of arthritis. Having your vet conduct a physical examination of your bulls prior to joining is good insurance.

Don't forget – make sure both your bulls and cows have been vaccinated for reproductive diseases such as Vibriosis. Consult your veterinarian to develop a herd vaccination program.