Pregnancy Testing and Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluation

Beneficial Categories

Background and Benefits of Adoption

Reproductive health and productivity of cattle are main determinants of profit potential. Breeding success in a natural breeding herd depends on the reproductive health of both the cow and bull. Pregnancy testing the female herd and bull breeding soundness evaluations (BSE) should be performed yearly by your veterinarian to ensure any fertility issues are identified.

Pregnancy Testing

Pregnancy testing is a good way to monitor the cow herd's reproductive performance and make appropriate management decisions. It is an especially useful practice during a drought or when winter feed prices are high as late bred and open cows can be sold to reduce feeding costs. Pregnancy testing can be conducted as early as 30–45 days after the end of the breeding season. Benefits of pregnancy testing include:

- Evaluating herd and bull fertility
- Determining approximate calving dates
- Assisting with sorting cows into appropriate management groups
- Identifying open and late-bred cows and heifers
- The opportunity to provide the cow herd booster vaccines or administer required treatments
- The opportunity to update your veterinary-client-patient relationship and herd health programs

Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluation

For both natural breeding and AI, bulls are expected to breed a number of heifers and cows. Typically, yearling bulls are evaluated before being sold. For bulls used in natural service, it is important to test them every year before breeding starts because the reproductive ability of individual bulls can vary from year to year. A BSE is performed by your veterinarian and evaluates three key characteristics:

- Physical soundness
- Scrotal circumference
- Semen quality

The main benefits of a BSE include identification of bulls with poor breeding potential and bulls that are no longer fertile. Libido and mating ability are also important elements of a BSE but cannot be tested by

your veterinarian. Evaluating these elements will require observation of your bulls in the breeding field to ensure they are visibly attempting to breed. Even if a bull has the best potential to breed physically, if he is not actively seeking out females and attempting to breed, he will be unsuccessful and could negatively impact the future calf crop.

Potential Economic Costs/Benefits

The cost for pregnancy testing and a bull breeding soundness evaluation, typically on a per head basis, is set by your local veterinary clinic. The cost can be a deterrent to pregnancy testing or having a bull BSE performed, however, the benefits of identifying poor performing animals can be a greater economic benefit than the cost of testing.

Pregnancy Testing

The economics of pregnancy testing depend on a few variables including:

- The current cull cow market price
- Feed and overhead costs per cow
- Veterinary costs
- The management system

The Beef Cattle Research Council has a calculator to help determine the specific economics of pregnancy testing.

Breeding Soundness Evaluation

There are a lot of factors that go into decision making and eventual purchase of bulls. Proper management of those bulls is important to ensure bull longevity for multiple breeding seasons and to maximize the return on the initial investment in the bull. Having a BSE performed yearly by the local veterinarian is a small cost to ensure the bull's breeding potential and avoid open cows. If a bull is not able to breed successfully, the potential revenue from the calf crop will be much lower than it could have been. This loss in revenue has a much greater impact than the cost of a BSE test.

Financial Incentives

There are currently no financial incentives for adopting pregnancy testing or bull breeding soundness evaluations.

For more specific information on pregnancy testing and breeding soundness evaluations, contact your local veterinarian or visit the links below:

Government of Alberta – Breeding Soundness Evaluation of Bulls

Government of Ontario – Beef Bull Fertility

Merck Manual – Breeding Soundness Examination of Bulls

Beef Cattle Research Council – Pregnancy Detection

Beef Cattle Research Council – Preventing Reproductive Failure in Cow-Calf Herds

Beef Cattle Research Council – Protecting your Investment: Bull Management

South Dakota State University Extension – Checking for Success: the Value of Pregnancy Checking the Cow Herd