

Monitoring Bull Soundness Key to Pregnancy Result

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With Spring cow joining already commenced, monitoring joining bull soundness is paramount to herd conception rates. Spending adequate time visually assessing the soundness and ongoing serving ability of joining bulls, is an important investment in mating outcome. In most commercial scenarios, investing the 1-2 hours of management time observing your bulls each week, will dramatically reduce risk of sub-par conception rates from continually working injured bulls that require rest or medical attention.

Lameness is the leading cause of transient bull inactivity during joining. When checking bulls, it is essential to get all bulls up and walking, giving the opportunity to observe gait and soundness on all four legs and feet. Pay special attention to the hocks due to the high pressure placed on the hindlimbs when mounting cows, especially in rocky or hilly country. Mildly lame bulls pose a risk of injuring themselves permanently if allowed to continually work and should be temporarily removed until sound again. Work promptly with your veterinarian to determine any that require treatment.

Early observation of any abnormalities in the reproductive tract is essential. The testicles should hang freely, with no lacerations or swelling. At rest, the underline of the normal sheath should be parallel and consistent with the trunk line of the bull, with no swellings or lumps. The penis should fully extract into the sheath with no excessive prepuce visible or swollen. Remember any swelling to the sheath is important as it may be associated with a broken penis. This is a severe injury and needs immediate sexual rest and consultation of a management plan with your veterinarian.

Ideally watch all bulls serve cows periodically through the joining period, but especially any with a serving ability query from pre-joining veterinary bull semen and soundness testing. When serving a cow, the penis should erect straight with no deviation and should be of a light pink colouration, free from any lacerations, swelling or growths. It is important to observe not only intromission into the cow's vagina, but to continue to watch for the ejaculatory thrust when the bull will jump forward with both hind feet attempting to leave the ground. Without this, a successful ejaculation has not occurred.

Continue to observe the bull after ejaculation. It is often easiest to visualise the true extension of the penis as the bull exits the cow post serving. The penis should be in at least 30cm of extension at this time, and straight. The penis should then fully retract back into the sheath easily and quickly. As the bull de-mounts the cow, is also a good opportunity to observe for any pain in the legs.

Adequate body condition score is an important part of a bulls libido, to remain virile throughout the joining season. It is quite normal for bulls to drop considerable fat cover during joining, and often at relatively rapid rate in the first third of the joining. This is due to the high number of cows coming into season, and general fitness of the bull at the beginning of the joining period. Body condition is of concern when actual muscle mass is seen decreasing, and immediate action needs to be taken if this is apparent. Possible causes

include inadequate nutrition, severe bullying or an underlying disease condition. As a general rule, bulls should begin joining no less than BCS 3.5/5, and would be at their best performance if maintained at BCS 3/5 through joining.

A list of all farm bulls in your pocket notebook, with simple tick box's for soundness and observation of a successful serving, is a great way to keep track of each bull working throughout the season. With a record being kept, bull's that haven't been seen serving can be prioritised for your next assessment. This is useful information to ensure all bulls have been observed performing well, proving their position in your bull battery.

Finally, remember that in an average 12 week joining, each individual cow may only have as little as 3-4 twelve hour periods of standing heat. This shows the significance of having an adequate team of sound bulls working throughout the entire joining season. If you encounter problems, the sooner they are addressed the better the outcome, both in cow pregnancy rates and bull longevity in your breeding herd.