

## Bull Power

Teresa, Andrew and Polly have done quite a few InCalf consultations reviewing herds' breeding performance. While every farm is different, and each has its own strengths and weaknesses, lack of bull power is by far the commonest area of weakness. How do we measure the bulls' performance? Using the Fertility Focus Report we compare a herd's actual empty rate and estimated 6 week incalf rate with the industry targets for their length of mating.



If the 6 week in calf rate compares much better than does the final empty rate, we look more closely at bull numbers, selection and management.

If you would like to try this yourself, you can download your Fertility Focus Report from MindaPro or Mistro.

If you don't keep electronic records you can phone LIC or Ambreed and ask for one.

The table below gives recommendations for the number of bulls which should be *with the herd at any one time*. More are needed to allow for rotation and rest. You will see that the actual number recommended depends upon the size of the herd and the % which are pregnant when the bulls go in. The % pregnant will depend upon the length of AB, the submission rate and the 3 week non return rate. The 6 week incalf rate from your last Fertility Focus Report can give some indication but if you are in any doubt about how well AB has gone, you should assume a low percentage - about 40-50% - are pregnant when the bulls go in.

Day to day management makes a huge difference to bulls' performance so I have listed some risky practices (*over page*) which should be avoided.

I know that bull hire is expensive but \$650 for a 2 year old bull is less than one empty cow. Don't economise on bulls, it will cost you more in the long run.

### Likely % of herd pregnant at start of bull mating + bulls required

No. cows in milking herd	Very low (less than 40%)	Low (40-50%)	Moderate (50-70%)	High (more than 70%)
100	2-4	2-3	2	2
200	5-6	4-5	3	2
300	7-8	6	4-5	3
400	9-11	7-8	5-6	3-4
500	12-13	9-10	7	4-5
600	14-15	11-12	8-9	5-6

## BVD Testing of Bulls

### Avoid disasters – Make sure all your service bulls are BVD free



BVD is a widespread viral infection of NZ cattle and has a wide ranging impact on cattle performance and hence productivity, including growth of young stock, pregnancy rates, susceptibility to disease and milk production. A proportion of cattle that get exposed to the virus become carriers for life. These are the animals that become infected whilst still a foetus. These 'persistently infected' animals are the major cause of spread of infection and should be detected and culled.

Persistently infected bulls are a great way to spread the virus as their semen contains large amounts of virus. They are also introduced to the herd at a time of greatest potential impact – at mating and first 3 months of pregnancy. The virus affects conception rates and causes increased early embryonic loss. The semen quality of these bulls may also be inferior. If this isn't sufficient, there are likely to be persistently infected calves born the following spring. These can be hard to rear and may well die before reaching 2 years of life.

To avoid such disasters, it is essential that all bulls brought in for mating are tested free of BVD virus. It is preferable that they are also BVD vaccinated prior to their use. When purchasing bulls that are advertised as BVD tested, ask to see a veterinary certificate of proof or the actual laboratory results. Make sure the result says 'BVD Ag negative' or 'BVD PCR negative.' If they haven't been BVD tested, purchase them conditional on a free test. Purchase them early enough to allow this to happen and give time for 2 vaccinations one month apart prior to their use – i.e. purchase at least 6 weeks prior to putting them into the herd.

## Potentially Risky Bull Management Practices (In-Calf Program)

- Any bulls more than 4 years old
- Mixed ages of bulls
- Bulls brought together less than a month before mating
- Bulls more than 30% bigger than the cows
- Bulls less than 60% as big as the cows
- Bulls not drenched
- Bulls not tested for *and* vaccinated twice against BVD
- Second hand bulls
- Sharing bulls with friends and neighbours - whether intentionally or not (!)
- Having a single bull with any group of females
- Aggressive bulls
- Bulls too thin or too fat
- Not watching each bull serve to make sure he's doing it right
- Bringing bulls into concrete yards
- Bulls walking on tracks too much
- Leaving a lame bull in with the cows
- Not rotating bulls or having rest periods of less than 48 hrs
- Using dogs with bulls



Few of these practices alone will cause major bull under performance but the more of them you do, the greater the risk that your bulls will under perform.

If you are unable, or unwilling, to give up your risky bull management practices you can compensate by increasing the number of bulls.

### Extended Treatment With Spectrazol



Recent trials using extended treatments with Spectrazol have shown an increased cure rate for cows with Staph aureus mastitis. This isn't unexpected given that we know the longer we treat an infection with any antibiotic the more likely we are to get a cure.

However the people who make Spectrazol have gone one step further and registered withholding periods for extended therapy with Spectrazol if you choose to lengthen your treatment period. For the standard 3 treatments at consecutive milkings the WHP remains at 4 milkings. If however you choose to treat for a longer period, up to eight consecutive treatments, the WHP goes out to 6 milkings, which is still only 3 days. So if you are making headway treating a case with Spectrazol but feel like she would benefit from a couple more tubes you can use them with confidence knowing that an official WHP now exists for extended therapy.



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