



THE
WOOD
VETERINARY
GROUP



FARM NEWSLETTER APRIL 2017

Breeding Bulls

Hopefully you've all had a successful calving season and are now starting to think about the next breeding season as bulls go back to work. This means it is time to make sure all your bulls are in tip top condition for the most productive and cost effective season.

IS HE UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

A single fertile bull should get 45 out of 50 cows pregnant within a 9 week period. However, recent studies in the UK show that 20 - 30% of bulls that have been fertility tested were sub-fertile. All too often this is identified on a PD or scanning session and the calving block inevitably drifts. The costs of this are enormous and it is a huge drain on resources including forages, bedding and staff hours. By performing a Breeding Soundness Examination 6 to 10 weeks prior to the start of work, we can highlight issues ahead of time allowing for any problems to be rectified or for a new bull to be purchased.

Breeding Soundness Exam includes:

- Thorough general health assessment including teeth and feet, legs and locomotion (fundamental for service)
- Body condition score (aim for 3 - 3.5)
- Health treatments check (vaccinations, blood samples for new purchases/accreditation, parasite control)
- Palpation and assessment of both internal and external sexual organs (including testicle size/consistency)
- Ejaculate sampling to assess semen quality (volume, density of viable sperm, motility and abnormalities)



This allows us to see whether he will be fit for purpose and we provide you with a certificate stating the outcome of the examination. This is often useful for bulls you intend to sell for breeding purposes.

Many factors affect breeding soundness including age related fertility, ill health, lameness and general trauma to name but a few. Occasionally, we have seen bulls that have suffered unseen penile injuries during the last breeding season leaving them unable to serve cows. For this reason we would recommend a bull exam to be performed each year.

NEW MAN ON THE BLOCK?

Breeding bulls are often the only new animals coming into a unit – they can bring in a host of diseases and parasites to your naïve herd with disastrous effects. These include BVD, IBR, Johne's and Leptospirosis as well as internal and external parasites such as fluke.

So how do you get a 'clean' bull?

Before you buy - Test for Johne's and request the status of the whole source herd as young animals are hard to test accurately

Before you buy - Test for BVD, IBR and Lepto and request vaccination status of all of them

On arrival - keep bulls in quarantine for 3 weeks and away from your pastures until treated with a full quarantine protocol for: Liver Fluke and gastrointestinal worms and External Lice

On arrival - Observe in quarantine for signs of illness and lameness

WHICH BULL TO BUY?

Select a bull based on your production system guided by Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs):



- If selling weaned calves? – Focus on direct calving ease, birth weight, muscle area and 200 day growth
- If producing Finished Stock? – Focus on 400 day weight and fat depth
- If breeding own replacements? – Direct and Daughter calving ease, 200 day milk yield and scrotal circumference (i.e. daughter fertility) must be assessed.
- Beef bull for Dairy Cows? – Prioritise calving ease, lower birth weight and shorter gestation to reduce costs from calving assistance

BUT CRUCIALLY – BASE BULL SELECTION ON YOUR COW AND HEIFER SIZE

A bull is a big investment. He needs to stay fit and fertile for at least 6 breeding years, pass on the genetic traits he was picked for and produce healthy, viable calves. However, data from 2000-2003 suggests that the average bull lifespan is 6 years meaning typically 4 working seasons. Therefore, we need to make sure we look after our bulls at all times to get the best return.

Milksure

Antibiotic usage in agriculture is a hot topic at present. The issues of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), usage of critically important antibiotics and very importantly public perception of the industry are all very relevant. One area of particular concern is medicine residues in milk. The percentage of bulk tanks that fail an antibiotic residue test is relatively low – 0.25%. However, not all bulk tanks samples are tested and if we extrapolate this then the potential number of annual failures is about 7,500. Not an insignificant number. Despite various initiatives over the years these figures have changed little.

Therefore, a new initiative has been launched by Dairy UK to safeguard residue-free milk. This is an approximately 3 hour training course for anyone involved in the milking process. The training is delivered by us and provides an accredited certification on completion for both the farm and individuals who are trained.

Initially you must register for the course online at www.milksure.co.uk. We will then be notified and we can begin to organise a group training session at the practice.



In line with this, there has been a new test established that can identify 49 different antibiotics and in initial test runs has found residues in milk at the point of sale and will undoubtedly be used in routine testing from now on. This only encourages us to update knowledge on all medicines use, especially when used off licence. Some examples are, Cobactan MC and Cephaguard DC. The exact label withdrawal must be observed and when used off licence these withdrawal periods must be lengthened to 7 days for milk. For example, when Cobactan intramammary tubes are used with Cobactan injection then milk is withheld for 120 hours not 24hours – would EVERYONE who milk for you know that?

At present, this certification and training is only a recommendation of Red Tractor and processing companies but, is likely to become compulsory to have both the farm and at least one staff member certified. Whilst on the topic of Red Tractor, there are changes to include a requirement for a 12 month medicines summary within your health plans. Within this it would highlight where critically important antibiotics are being used and outline the policy for reducing their usage on farm. Inspectors will also want to see 2 Vet Health Plans i.e. the current one and the one from the previous 12 month period. We will try and remind you when these are due but please give us plenty of notice so we can make the health plan visit a useful and proactive discussion.