

Now is the time to MOT bulls for the breeding season

Bulls should be able to get 90 per cent of normally cycling, disease-free cows or heifers pregnant in nine weeks. To do this, as veterinary surgeon Keith Cutler of Endell Vets, Salisbury, says, it must be fit and healthy, with good mobility and libido and a fully functioning reproductive system. Speaking during an Eblex teleconference, Mr Cutler said many,

Farmers Guardian Handy Hints

but not all of these factors could be influenced by management in the period before the bull was put with the cows.

He said: "Preparation makes a lot of common sense when you think about what the bull is expected to do.

Management

"He must remain active for a lengthy period of time, be able to identify bulling cows and deliver fertile semen. Good management and preparation in advance of the breeding season can pay dividends."

Body condition score and nutrition



BULLS should be 'fit not fat' in order to sniff out the female pheromones and hunt out the bulling cows.

They should be on a rising plane of nutrition before and

during the serving period to ensure stamina, libido and sperm production. It takes about six weeks for a bull to produce fully fertile sperm, so planning ahead with nutrition is key.

Too thin and it will affect all of these factors and if too fat, mobility will be affected and too much fat in the scrotum will have an impact on sperm production.

Mobility

FEET should be examined a month to six weeks in advance of the breeding season, allowing time for any lesions to heal.

Any defects causing, or with the potential to cause, lameness can then be addressed and given time for treatment to take effect.

Parasite control

A **WELL**-nourished mature bull is unlikely to require worming, but liver fluke might be an issue which could need addressing, depending on farm history and time of year.

Infectious diseases

VACCINATIONS should be given well in advance of the breeding season and a blood test can also be done to provide an ongoing assessment of the bull's Johne's disease status. Just because it may have had a negative result early in life, does not mean it will be free of infection. Newly-acquired bulls may also require testing.

Think about where else the bull has been - if it has only ever been used on your farm, it will have the same health status as your herd, but if it has been hired in or out, it may have picked up other diseases.

They may need their sheaths washing with an antibiotic solution on three consecutive days to ensure campylobacter is not introduced into the herd.

Assess mating and libido

EVEN if you have established your bull is fit and fertile before the serving period, problems can still arise at any time. Monitor the performance of the

bull during the serving period to ensure it is serving the cows and the repeat rate is not greater than expected.

Make a note of served cows and

Breeding soundness examination

A **CRITICAL** examination of the bull's reproductive apparatus should be carried out to make sure it is normal and working properly.

Any discharge from the foreskin, swellings, scabs or erosion within the foreskin and asymmetry or atrophy (shrinking or shrivelling) of the testes should be noted and discussed with a vet.

Mr Cutler recommends carrying out a full pre-breeding examination, which includes palpation of both the external and internal genitalia to ensure the absence of abnormalities, that the penis is movable within and can be extruded from the foreskin.

Both testicles should be of adequate and uniform size (size correlates with the number of

cows it will be able to serve) and normal consistency. Slight variations do not matter, but alert the vet if there is a notable difference.

Hardness

They should be firm and freely-moveable. Hardness can indicate the presence of infection, soft can mean sperm production is not taking place and if the testes are not freely-movable it may mean a previous infection has caused scar tissue, which is stopping production or blocking the passage of sperm through the penis and into the cow.

A sperm sample may also be taken.

watch for them bulling three weeks later. Bulls should be roaming the field or shed, actively searching for bulling cows, and you should check to see if it is mounting cows

properly (bulls can sometimes hurt their back during mounting).

If a bull is infertile, for whatever reason, it is important to know as soon as possible.