

NEWS

In this issue:

- ◆ Seasonal reminders
- ◆ When to treat non-cycling cows
- ◆ How many bulls do I need?
- ◆ Other bull tips
- ◆ Beware heliotrope poisoning

Seasonal reminders:

- Any calf that has an umbilical hernia needs treatment as soon as possible. The anaesthetic and surgery are much more difficult and prone to complications if the calf is bigger and older.
- Bulls should be fertility tested and vaccinated annually against vibrio and pestivirus at least 2 weeks before you plan to use them. All newly purchased bulls should be ear notched and tested for BVD.
- Late calving cows, especially older cows, are more prone to milk fever. Cows with milk fever in hot weather are very susceptible to heat stress. Douse cows with cold water if down and exposed to the sun or move into a shady spot.
- Consider vaccinating your calves with the pinkeye vaccine **Piligard**. Calves require just one dose of **Piligard**.

When to treat non-cycling cows

If cows have been treated with PG the best time to treat non-cyclers is 11 days after the last injection of PG. This is because the follicles in the ovaries are at the right stage where they can best respond to an injection of GnRH (Gonabreed).

It is tempting to treat non-cyclers a week or so after PG as most of the cows that were going to respond have already done so but it is better to wait the full 11 days.

In a double PG synchronisation program, it means that all cows are joined in the first 21 days of mating as the non-cycling cow treatment program is 10 days long.

How many bulls do I need?

More than you had last year – is the answer on most farms. Every year during pregnancy testing we see examples where the bulls have left too many empty cows.

The message from InCalf is that you need 3 bulls for every 100 cows at the **start of the AI period** or 4 per 100 cows if synchrony is used. This means that if you have 200 cows to join at the start of AI you will need between 6 and 8 bulls.

This assumes a 6-week AI period where you get just over half the cows pregnant. Our district average 6-week in calf rate is about 53% which means that in our herd of 200 cows there will be, on average, 90 something empty cows when the bulls go in.

It is important to have the bulls on the farm several weeks before they are due to start work. Sperm production is a delicate business, and the stress of transport and acclimatisation will upset sperm quality. The production line for sperm takes 70 days so it can take this long to correct any problems.

Aim to give the bulls plenty of time to socialise before they are put to work.

Bulls will work out a hierarchy or pecking order and it is better to do this well before they are expected to find cows on heat and get them pregnant. You want your bulls to be lovers not fighters.

Other bull tips

➤ **Keep the resting bulls away from the dairy**

The group of bulls that are resting should be kept in an area that has plenty of shade and water. If that area is near the dairy the bulls that are with the cows will try to stop the cows from going anywhere near the resting bulls. If you have ever had a bull that walks in front of the cows and slows things down it is usually because he is trying to keep "his" cows away from his rivals.

➤ **Keep bulls off concrete**

There has been a swing towards using Friesian bulls over the last few years. In that time, we have seen both more injured cows and more lame bulls.

Big bulls are more prone to feet problems, so it is worth the extra hassle of drafting them off before they reach the concrete. This is difficult the first few times, but it is worthwhile persisting as bulls will eventually learn what to do.

It is also important that they do not get access to too much grain as this can also affect their feet. If bulls are rotated regularly and get no grain when they are rested - and then a big slug again when they are with the cows - it is likely they will get laminitis and more feet problems.

➤ **Vaccinate your bulls with pestigard and vibrovax**

Pestigard protects bulls against infection with BVD. If you have a BVD carrier in your herd unprotected bulls can get a mild and temporary infection with BVD that has a serious effect on fertility.

Vibrio is a sexually transmitted disease spread from cow to cow by

the bulls. Vaccinating halts the spread.

All bulls should be ear notch tested for BVD when they first arrive on your farm.

➤ **Virgin bulls need training**

It usually takes virgin bulls about a week to learn what they are supposed to do. If you have some empty carry-over cows that are on heat before the bulls are due to start it might be worth running these cows with the virgin bulls to let them get some practice.

➤ **Rotate bulls every 4 to 7 days**

Young bulls exhaust their supplies more quickly than older bulls and probably need to rest after 4 days. Older bulls pace themselves better but should not be left with the cows for longer than 7 days without a break.

➤ **Watch bulls mate**

Make sure that each bull is capable of mating with cows on heat. There are many reasons why bulls cannot mate successfully, including: -

- Sore feet
- Sore back
- Damaged penis
- Hair ring around penis
- Low libido (no interest)

Beware heliotrope poisoning

The forecast for this summer is above average rainfall. If we do get a lot of rain, then summer weeds will follow particularly Heliotrope (potato weed). Heliotrope contains a substance that is toxic to the liver.

Every wet summer we see cases of heliotrope toxicity.

Cattle that eat too much heliotrope often do not show clinical signs until many months have passed. The symptoms are often vague but include weight loss, poor appetite, drop in milk production and occasionally

neurological signs such as head pressing and stumbling.

It is a difficult syndrome to diagnose in a live animal but relatively straightforward once we get a piece of liver either from a liver biopsy or from a post-mortem.

We have even seen heliotrope toxicity in newborn calves. The only exposure these calves had to heliotrope was before they were born when their mothers were grazing heliotrope. The calves were happy and healthy when they were born but became sick one by one over a period of months. Their symptoms were vague and included loss of condition and scouring and eventually death.

When we examined the dead calves, it was obvious that they were jaundiced (yellow) and had abnormal livers.

There is no treatment for cattle affected by heliotrope poisoning and the symptoms may not surface for many months or even years after heliotrope has been grazed.

Whether or not heliotrope will be a problem this summer is unknown. We recommend that you avoid grazing cattle on heliotrope as the effects are difficult to diagnose, impossible to treat and potentially disastrous.



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