

April 23, 2019
 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 David Dugan
 Extension Educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources
 and Community Development

Are Your Bulls Ready?

The weather has finally improved and I think most livestock producers are a little less stressed now than they were a month or two ago. The winter of 2018-2019 was tough on livestock and those who care for them. The mud, and lack of good quality hay, may have put some cows in a lower body condition than normal. This may have showed up with weaker than normal calves, cows may have lower quality colostrum, and the two of these could make for less than healthy calves.

The warmer sunny days make things seem better, at least for the people taking care of the livestock. Hopefully the calves made it through the rough times and are now growing as you would hope. However, that is not the end of the potential problems from the stressful winter. How are the cows?

Body condition scoring is a good way to evaluate cows. Dave Mangione, a retired OSU Extension Agent, put together a factsheet that explains the Body Condition Scoring. The factsheet includes pictures to give you a little better idea of what you are looking for and something to compare to when looking at your cows, in order to put a BCS (Body Condition Scoring) on them. The factsheet is on Ohioline at: <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/anr-54>

Body Condition Scoring may give you a better estimate of what your management strategy going forward into breeding season. I realized some of you may already be ready to turn the bulls out, or in some cases the bull is out. However, it seems more and more producers are calving in March and April in recent years. Thin cows do not seem to breed back as well as cows in better flesh. That does not mean fat. Too much flesh is a potential problem, too. It may be worse. If your cows are scoring 3 or 4 you may want to increase the feed ASAP.

Now, that you have the cows in mind, do not forget the bulls. The bulls should be body condition scored, too. This is pretty much the same thought of not too thin and not too fat. Thin bulls will struggle to cover very many cows in a timely manner, and fat bulls may not be able to take care of his business. This is only part of the management of the bulls. You have several cows, but maybe only one bull. If one cow has an issue that may prevent her from breeding back, you may have one open cow. If the one bull has an issue that may prevent him from breeding cows you may have one entire cow herd open. No calves equals no money. So for a small fee, somewhere in the neighborhood of \$50 you can have a veterinarian do a BSE (Breeding Soundness Exam) on your bull. It may be the best money you spend if you find out the only bull you have can't breed for some reason.

I know, getting the bull in the chute or on a trailer can be a job that you do not want to do. In some cases you may just not have the facilities to do so. If this is the case, the next best option may be to monitor the situation closely. Watch cows on a daily basis and record when cow XYZ is in heat. Watch each cow and record the date she is standing for the bull, then observe 21 days later. If cows are coming back into heat the bull may be a problem.



Now, what else do have to do to improve your potential for getting everything working as it should for the cows and bulls? What other management tool is needed to get everyone ready for a successful breeding season? Remember the hay quality for many was subpar in many operations this winter.

How is your mineral program? If the hay was subpar, then the intake of essential vitamins and minerals may be subpar, too. A good mineral program is always a key to success, but it may be even more important this year.

The cows have probably been getting mineral on a regular basis, especially with spring time threats of grass tetany. The need for additional magnesium is important this time of the year. So, how about the bulls? Some of the macro and micro nutrients are very important for semen production and performance for the bull. Mineral is needed in advance of the day you open the gate and send him out with the cows. Mineral should be available year round, but ramping things up about 45 days prior to breeding season will get the bull a better chance covering all of the cows in a tight window that will provide a calf crop grouped up the way you want them.

When it comes to mineral, most companies have an economical line, a middle of the road mineral and a Cadillac. You get what you pay for, and the generic is probably not enough, but the Cadillac may be more than you need. Talk to your feed dealer, your veterinarian or a nutritionist about what your herd might need to perform at their best, but in most cases the middle of the road mineral, from any company, will meet your needs.

Dates to Remember

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| May 16 | Weed Identification at Western Brown HS Community Room at 7:00 p.m. Free and open to the public, brought to you by the Brown Co. Master Gardeners. |
| July 7-13 | Adams County Fair |