

NEWS COLUMN

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Winter Management of the Bull

Many of us hate to have herd bulls around except when we need them. They eat a lot and are extremely rough on facilities, fences and equipment. If we could only just put them into storage for 9 months of the year. Wishful thinking but they are a pain. Consider the following with your herd bulls this winter.

1. If possible separate them from the cow herd. This allows you to feed and manage them separately. Less bedding, more accurate feeding, care, etc.
2. Provide them plenty of bedding in cold weather. In winters with long cold snaps (2-3 week periods of less than 10° F temps) bulls can easily get frozen testicles which leads to high levels of temporary or permanent infertility.
3. Feed more energy to young or thin bulls. More energy includes more grain, grain by-products, or quality corn silage. If under-conditioned animals are fed high forage diets gaining condition will be very difficult.
4. Check bulls frequently for soundness/health. Bulls often fight and at times this can cause injury to feet and legs which can be reduced to temporary status if bulls are separated in a timely fashion.
5. Don't overfeed bulls. Overfed bulls are a waste of feed and often can lead to soundness problems, (slow movement, swollen joints). Over-conditioned bulls may also not adequately perform during the breeding season. Some bulls can actually weigh too much to properly service small to moderate weight cows or heifers.
6. Before breeding season next spring seriously consider a breeding soundness exam for your bull(s). This includes a semen test (quality, motility and quantity) possible hoof trimming, testicle exam, infertility shots, etc. Most vets can do on farm exams at a very reasonable rate. \$30-\$50. This is much cheaper than a pasture of late calving or worse yet, open females.
7. Although most of our bulls have very gentle dispositions, NEVER treat them like pets. Many, if not most, bull-related injuries involve so-called "gentle" bulls that can be walked up to and scratched or petted. I know how tempting this is to treat a gentle bull as a pet, but it is an accident looking for a place to happen. Bulls must always be treated with the utmost respect-and they must always respect people. When you walk toward a bull, he should turn and move away from you. If he doesn't, you should tap him lightly on the nose with a stick. Never allow him to hold his ground or to get the bluff on you. We don't want our bulls to be afraid of us, but we do want them to know that we are boss.