

## MOT your stock bull

Bull fertility is key to maintaining a compact calving period, maximising the value of the calf crop and overall herd profitability.



While only 5% of bulls are infertile, subfertility, where the bull produces fewer calves than a fully fertile bull, is much more common. Subfertility may be caused by low libido, poor sperm quality/quantity, defects or physical factors affecting bull mobility or mating ability. Frequently, sub-fertile bulls go undetected and problems do not become apparent until much of the breeding season has elapsed or until cows are checked for pregnancy. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that a bull will retain its fertility from season to season or within a season.

Ensuring bulls are ready for work requires forward planning, as semen production

takes 60 days. The bull must be in good health and ready to work at least eight weeks before the breeding season begins.

It is important to ensure that hired bulls or bulls that have worked in other herds have been health tested before use. They have an increased risk of introducing disease, including campylobacter. Have them blood tested for BVD and Johne's disease and ask your vet to sheath wash them.

### Breeding soundness examination

It is important to ask an experienced vet to perform a bull MOT or breeding soundness examination on breeding bulls before the start of the breeding season.

Checks include:

- Feet, legs and locomotion
- Scrotum and testes – measuring scrotal circumference and looking for abnormalities
- Body condition score – ideally 3.0-3.5
- Semen quality – volume, density, motility and abnormalities
- Health treatments are up-to-date – vaccinations, internal and external parasite control



## Nutrition

Nutrition is highly correlated with bull fertility. Avoid feeding high levels of concentrate for prolonged periods. This can lead to movement problems, reduced semen quality and diminished libido. Supplement good-quality forage with 2-3kg of high fibre, 14% crude protein concentrate, depending on body condition. Remember to include a mineral supplement in the diet.

Body condition score bulls six to eight weeks before the breeding season starts. Investigate reasons for any loss of condition, examine teeth, nutrition and overall health. Bulls should be on a rising plane of nutrition as the breeding season begins. Too much, or too little, body condition can mean reduced semen quality and libido.



## Breeding season

During the breeding season, it is important to check a bull's locomotion, any evidence of injury and that it is physically capable of mating cows. The best evidence of a bull's fertility potential is his ability to get cows pregnant. Therefore, it is advisable to record the identity of the first cows bred and either check these cows for signs of heat or confirm pregnancy by ultrasound scanning the cows 25-35 days after breeding. This is particularly important for young bulls joining the herd.

Further information on managing bulls can be found in the BRP manual  
[Fit for Purpose Bulls, a Blueprint for Breeders.](#)