

## Newsletter October 2021

### Testing your Bull

Tom Crosby

Whether you are a beef farmer or a dairy farmer; block calving or all year round, it is very important that you get your bull tested once a year. Consider it an MOT for your bull! The test is called a Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluation (BBSE) and is used to evaluate a bull's fertility.

#### Why?

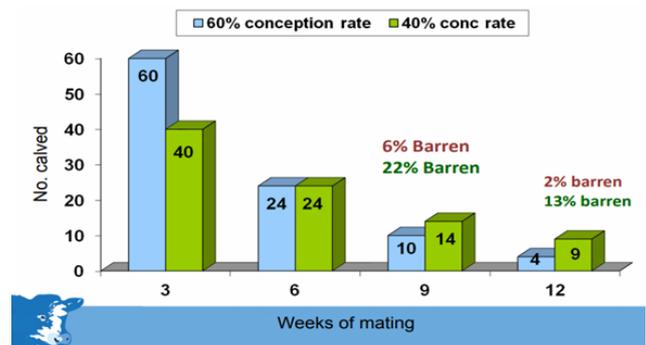
Unless the bull has an obvious physical ailment that is stopping it from being able to serve cows (lame, sick, etc.) it is impossible to determine his fertility just by looking at him. Being fertile the previous year does not guarantee that he will be fertile the following year.

Various studies have consistently shown that between 20 – 25% of bulls that undergo routine breeding soundness tests are found to be subfertile or infertile (Penny 2010).

Infertility is rare but subfertility is far more common; these bulls are still able to serve and impregnate cows, but they are not achieving a conception rate equal to a fertile bull. These subfertile bulls are often hard to discover without a BBSE, particularly if the farm runs more than one bull, as the other bulls will continue to serve the cows and effectively 'cover up' the subfertile bull's shortcomings. Poor fertility figures, a poor conception rate or a spread-out block calving pattern are all outcomes of using a subfertile bull. These subfertile bulls will typically achieve a 40% conception rate, whereas a fertile bull will achieve at least 60%.

The figure to the right shows the direct effect a subfertile bull would have on a herd of 100 cows. A subfertile bull would give you a 13% barren rate after 12 weeks, whereas a fertile bull should give you 2%. The calving pattern is also more spread out. A target of >65% of cows calving in the 1<sup>st</sup> 3 weeks of the start of calving is achieved in herds with good fertility in cows and bulls, with a target of a barren rate of <5%.

If you are noticing these issues retrospectively it means the damage has already been done. This will cause financial losses, both through increased requirement for replacements due to culling barren cows, and fewer calves to sell. This why it is so important to have your bull tested at least 2 months before you intend to use him when aiming for a block or seasonal calving herd. 2 months gives time to notice a problem and rectify it before the bull is needed to serve cows.



In all year-round calving herds including dairy herds, the subfertile bull is still difficult to spot. There will be more cows returning to heat, leading to an extended calving interval and reduced milk production. Without having the bull tested it can be easy to wrongly consider the cows to be the problem rather than the bull. A routine BBSE is therefore recommended at least once a year to ensure this issue do not go unseen. A rough target of a 50% conception rate should be achieved, dependent on yield.

#### How?

Your vet will bring most of the equipment needed. However, you will be required to provide a few things for the safety of everyone involved. The most important of these is a good crush! The second thing that will be needed for the test to be carried out is a power source. Without access to mains electricity close to where the test is to be carried out the vet will not be able to use the necessary equipment needed.

If you are interested in getting an MOT for your bull, please phone your local FarmVets SouthWest office and we can organise a time to come out test him for you.

# Are your stock getting the minerals they require?

Cormac White

We have carried out a number of bloods on poorly thriving stock recently demonstrating **low copper, low selenium and low vitamin B12** in different classes of stock. As you all know the high levels of Molybdenum on the Somerset levels prevent adequate uptake of copper and there are areas that are particularly low in Selenium too. Vitamin B12 levels typically fall when grass is fast, growing and lush. **Low levels of these minerals can cause fertility issues, poor growth, increased incidence of disease etc etc etc!**

We can carry out bloods on a cohort of animals within a group to get an idea of their mineral status. We have injectable copper and selenium options as well as bolus options and we have drenches that can be administered to finishing lambs.



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION - TB testing

As you are aware, DEFRA are introducing 6-monthly testing. This will massively increase vets TB workload. To help ease this, DEFRA have allowed trained and qualified lay people to carry out testing. We have employed 2 of these ATTs at the moment (Approved Tuberculin Testers). Many of you will have our ATTs doing your test. We must prioritise and free up our vets for clinical work. Please note there will be **no clinical work undertaken at your DEFRA tests** (paid for by DEFRA). You must organise a separate vet visit for this. We hope you can understand this is the only way all farmers will get their testing done in a timely fashion.



### FVSW Instagram!

We have officially set up an Instagram page for FarmVets SouthWest! We will be showcasing what the vets get up to alongside helpful information and lots of pictures of cows! You can find us by searching our username:

**farmvetssouthwest**

### Lungworm

WE ARE IN PEAK LUNGWORM SEASON.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT ALL CLASSES OF STOCK ARE WORMED AT FIRST SIGN OF COUGHING.

**LUNGWORM CAN KILL COWS!**

### Foot Trimming Course

We are now taking bookings for the Foot Trimming course that we have on **13th and 28th October**. If you are interested, please contact the office on **01278 663399**.

