

September 2023 Newsletter

Testing your Bull

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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?

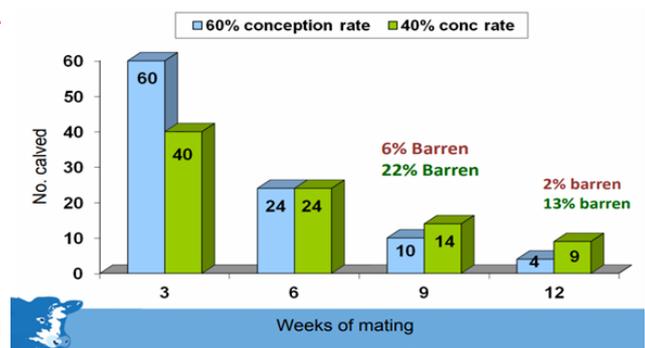
Unless the bull has an obvious physical ailment that is stopping it from being able to serve cows (lame, sick, etc.) it is impossible to determine his fertility just by looking at him. Being fertile the previous year does not guarantee that he will be fertile the following year.

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 1st 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. It is 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 even more 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 does not go unseen. A rough target of a 50% conception rate should be achieved, dependent on yield.

How?

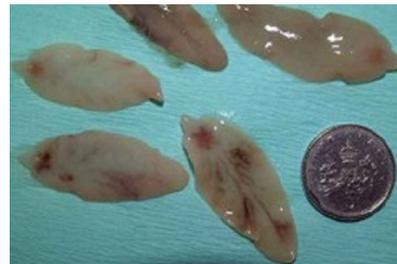
Your vet will bring most of the equipment needed. However, you will be required to provide a few things for the safety of everyone involved. **The most important of these is a good crush!** The second thing that will be needed for the test to be carried out is a **power source**. Without access to mains 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. A BBSE costs £150 plus a visit fee.

Monitoring Fluke in Sheep and Cattle

A Wet summer means ideal conditions for snails which transmit fluke! We have already diagnosed early acute liver fluke infections in sheep this year!

Sheep and cattle are *at highest risk of acute liver fluke infection from August to October*. At this time, animals of any age can ingest liver fluke larvae (metacercariae) while grazing, which continue their lifecycle by migrating through the liver and damaging it as they do so. **The only effective treatment for acute liver fluke is triclabendazole.** The cheapest and most commonly used product containing this drug is Endofluke.



Monitoring for infection and treating at the right time is essential, as inappropriate treatment regimes increase the risk of resistance developing. Furthermore if you administer treatment prior to infection then you have simply wasted your money.

Acute liver fluke can kill animals, particularly in sheep not vaccinated against clostridial diseases as Black's disease will quickly kill sheep with damaged livers from fluke. Chronic infections initiated at this time of the year can have serious impacts on fertility and health.

How can you monitor for early fluke infection?

OPTION 1- BLOOD SAMPLE 6 LAMBS / YOUNG CATTLE - replacements or otherwise running with the flock or herd to check for antibody levels (Blood sampling adult animals does not give an accurate indication of when they were infected as levels may still be raised from last year).

Why not do this at your TB Whole Herd test or at your next pre-movement test/Vet Visit?

OPTION 2- TAKE DUNG SAMPLES FROM 6 INDIVIDUAL ANIMALS - We then test this for fluke faecal antigen. An antigen is effectively a biological marker in the faeces, providing an indication that there is an immature fluke infection. Faecal antigen testing can pick up a fluke infection two to four weeks after ingestion of the larvae, much earlier than waiting until eggs can be found in the faeces. These can be dropped into any of our offices where we can send them off for sampling.

DON'T WASTE YOUR MONEY - TREAT FOR FLUKE AT THE RIGHT TIME BY MONITORING FOR INFECTION

FARMVETS SOUTHWEST ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION COURSE

We will be running an AI course from **Tuesday the 24th to Thursday the 26th of October** this year. The course will be kindly hosted by our farmers in Buckland St Mary and Chedzoy on alternating days. If you are interested in signing up or sending one of your farm team on this course, please call the Bridgwater office to book on.



Please Note

Our Ilminster office is always shut from 12.30pm - 1.30pm for lunch.

If you have any of our cool bags at home that have been used to transport fridge drugs, please can you return them. We are running very low!