

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Care of the Newly Purchased Young Bulls

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Many fall production sales are offering outstanding young bulls for commercial cow calf producers to bring to their herds. Many of these young bulls are only 12 to 18 months of age at sale time. They represent a sizeable investment in the future of the commercial cow herds that purchase them. Proper care of the young bull will help maximize the genetic improvement that he brings to your ranch.

Any rancher that purchases a young, well-conditioned bull should plan to gradually reduce the fleshiness of the bull before the breeding season. To let these bulls down, it is a good practice to start them on a ration that is similar to the one to which they have been accustomed, but that is 60 to 70 percent of their previous intake. The amount of grain can be reduced at the rate of about 10 percent per week until the desired level is achieved. At the same time, substitutions should be made in the form of light, bulky feeds--such as oats or alfalfa hay. Ideally, this letdown should be completed prior to the time a bull is turned out. Dramatic nutritional changes can have an adverse effect on semen production, so it is important that these ration modifications be done gradually. Allow the change to take place over several weeks instead of allowing a rapid condition and weight loss which could be reflected in a reduced calf crop next year. If a young bull is coming off of a high energy diet (i.e. gain test), an example feeding schedule would be as follows:

| Week | Type | % of Body wt. | lb. for 1000 lb. bull | lb. for 1500 lb. bull |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 st | bull test | 1.5 | 15 | 23 |
| | hay | 1.0 | 10 | 15 |
| 2 nd | bull test | 1.0 | 10 | 15 |
| | hay | 1.5 | 15 | 23 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|------|------|----|
| 3 rd | bull test | 1.0 | 10 | 15 |
| | hay | 1.5 | 15 | 23 |
| 4 th | bull test | .75 | 7.5 | 11 |
| | hay | 1.75 | 17.5 | 27 |

Check with the bull seller to learn about the bull's current diet. In many instances, the bull ration may already be well over 50% forage and the daily grain amount at the new home can be started at 1% or less of the bull's body weight.

One important note to consider! The protein content of the total diet needs to be at or above 12% crude protein. Therefore, if the hay quality is low and the bull test ration contains only 13 – 14% protein, then the bull may become protein deficient as the forage makes up a larger portion of the diet. Here are two suggested methods to offset this potential problem: 1) Top-dress the bull test feed with a protein (for example: soybean meal) pellet. One pound per head per day should offset most potential protein deficiencies; 2) Substitute 20% range cubes for the bull test concentrate. Start with 6 to 8 pounds of range cubes per day, then gradually reduce the intake of 20% cubes, while allowing free choice access to hay and/or pasture. Range cubes are readily available at many feed stores and commercial producers are already accustomed to handling them as a feedstuff. This will be a more dramatic decline in nutritional status for highly fed bulls, but will be much less stressful than immediately forcing the young bull to a diet of 100% low to average quality forage. If the bull has not been eating 6 to 8 pounds or more of grain or supplement each day, any high energy grain or range cube addition to his diet should be done gradually to avoid digestive disorders such as founder or acidosis.

Continue feeding the grain mix or cubes to the young bull during the breeding season if at all possible. This will be difficult in many range situations, but when possible, helps prevent severe weight and condition loss by the young bull.

The yearling bulls need to be taken from the breeding pasture after 60 days and fed to return to proper body condition.

Use of Young Bulls and Mature Bulls in Multi-Sire Pastures

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Producers often ask about the use of young bulls in the same breeding pasture with older, larger bulls. In most instances, this is a practice that should be discouraged if at all possible. Young bulls will normally lose the battle of deciding who is the dominant individual in the breeding pasture. Ranchers report that in some cases young bulls that have been severely “whipped” are less aggressive breeders after that incident. Australian data on multi-sire pastures have shown that some young bulls gain a dominant role as they mature and breed a large percentage of the cows. Other bulls will not gain that dominant status, and only breed a very small percentage of the cows in a multi-sire pasture.

The best solution is to always place young bulls with young bulls and mature bulls with mature bulls in the breeding pasture. In some situations, the rancher may choose to use the mature bulls in the first two-thirds of the breeding season, and then rotate in the young bulls. This allows the young bulls to gain one to two months of additional age and sexual maturity. In addition the young bulls should have considerably fewer cows in heat at the end of the breeding season as the mature bulls will have bred the majority of the cows or heifers. The young bulls will be in the breeding season only a few weeks and should not be as “run down” or in poor body condition at the conclusion of the breeding season.

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