

Jody Holthaus, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Livestock and Natural Resources

## Bull Buying Season

You can tell it's that time of year, to buy a bull, when your mailbox is filled up with sale catalogs! For decades we have been collecting performance data on bulls, but in earlier times it was mostly individual performance under feedlot conditions. A large breakthrough came when computers became available and statistical methods were developed to calculate Expected Progeny Differences. EPD's provide an estimate of the genetic potential of an animal as a parent based upon three sources of information: ancestors, the animal's own record and the record of its progeny.

EPD's are calculated by breed associations for all kinds of traits. Once you've determined which traits are the most important to your herd, you can go bull buying!

One of the most common mistakes with purchasing young bulls is bringing them home, turning them out with older bulls, and expecting them to do well. Most yearling bulls have spent the last 5 to 6 months on a high nutritional plane. They have been pushed and expected to achieve as much growth as possible. Removing them from that level of nutrition and putting them on a maintenance diet can be detrimental.

It may not be necessary to keep the young bull on a high gaining diet, but the bull is still growing and need adequate nutrition. From the time of purchase to breeding season, could be 3 to 5 months, you should strive to keep the bull at a Body Condition Score of 6 at the time of turnout. This will give the bull adequate nutrition and reserves of energy for use during the breeding season. A yearling bull can be expected to lose 100 pounds or more during the breeding season. Most bulls will be vaccinated and tested for fertility before the sale. If they have not, a breeding soundness exam (BSE) is necessary. Be sure to vaccinate bulls at least 30 days prior to turning out with the cows.

Yearling bulls will need time to adjust to their new surroundings. If you are turning them in with older bulls, they will need a large area so they can determine their order of dominance. Fighting is a natural occurrence with bulls, be sure to stay out of the way, and make sure the facilities can handle these brawls.

David Hallauer, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Crop and Soils, Horticulture

## How Low Should You Go?

Ample rain has arrived and once temperatures get back a little closer to normal, grass is going to take off and take off quickly! In some cases, it takes off way too quickly, requiring us to mow much more than we'd like!

Mowing height actually has more to do with the quality of your grass stand than you'd like to give it credit for. Take crabgrass seed for instance. Since it must have light to germinate, a good, thick turf stand and a higher mowing height can help shade the soil, preventing at least some potential germination. Remember as well that root depth and mowing height are related when it comes to our upright growing grasses like tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. What's that mean? The higher the height of cut, the deeper the root system and a deeper root system tends to equal a more drought-resistant turf.

So what should be our optimal mowing height? Great question!

In early spring, you might get by with mowing a little lower than normal – at least for a mowing or two. Doing so can actually speed green-up as it removes old, dead grass and encourages soil to warm up more quickly. Low is a relative term, however! You might be able to get as low as an inch to an inch and a half on fescue or Kentucky bluegrass, but you have to be very careful not to scalp the turf. Just be certain that you don't forget to raise the mowing height after that first or second cutting. Doing so can increase weeds and discourage deep rooting needed to keep the stand competitive.

The optimum height for the remainder of the season varies by your turf species. If you do decide to drop mowing heights for that first mowing, return the mowing height for Kentucky bluegrass to two to three inches and tall fescue heights to three to three and a half inches.

Grass will no doubt grow faster than you want it – and require you to mow much more than you might want! – but a healthy stand can really be encouraged by a proper mowing height. In addition to adherence to mowing height recommendations, turfgrass specialists also suggest following the 1/3 rule. That rule states you should never remove more than one third of the leaf tissue when mowing. For tall fescue, it means you want to maintain turf at a three and a half inch height. That means never letting it grow higher than four and a half inches before mowing.

Why the 1/3 rule? For starters, health of the grass plant is important. Frequent mowing stimulates lateral growth. We want energy and time spent by the grass spreading out – rather than only growing up (tall and spindly)! It creates a much more attractive turf as well!

Clipping management is also enhanced using the one third rule. If you bag your clippings because you don't want unsightly grass clumps in the yard that a) look bad and b) can harm the stand, the one third removal rule can help you eliminate those piles – and maybe bagging, too! Mowing more frequently and only removing one third at a time can actually allow us to put clippings back on the surface where they can degrade and provide valuable nutrients (clippings contain enough nutrients to reduce fertilizer needs by 25-33%) back in to our stand.

Happy mowing!

Cindy Williams, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Food and Nutrition, FNP

### Money Saving Tips

The rising cost of monthly expenses makes it challenging to save these days. Implement these tips:

\*Eat from your pantry and freezer. Take an inventory of what foods you have in your freezer and pantry. Get out your recipe box, cookbooks, or do an internet search to discover ways to cook these foods in quantity. Buy the basic ingredients to cook the dishes, such as milk. Freeze in serving sizes and enjoy.

\*Use items you have on hand. Look around your house and explore a book you've not read, a movie you've not watched, or a hobby kit you've never assembled. You will be surprised how many unused items you have. Someone may have given you a gift that you have never used. Savor and enjoy using these "new" items.

### Saver or Spender?

People know that having an emergency fund and money set aside to purchase larger items is important. Even so, turning that knowledge into action is a real challenge. That's why at the end of the month, you can end up without enough left over to save.

Are any of the following stumbling blocks for you, and your desire to save more each month?

1. Does the cost of living keep you from saving? Without a plan, that can easily be the case. Whether you call it a budget, spending plan, or something else, it can be the secret to having enough money for your regular expenses, a few extra frills and savings.
2. Are you an impulse shopper? Whether you shop online or physically go into stores, impulse buying tends to encourage satisfying "wants" versus "needs".
3. How are your time management skills? Although it may seem unrelated, leading a hectic and busy life doesn't allow time for thinking through and planning purchases. It also encourages purchasing for convenience which can be costly.
4. Do you have credit card balances? There are 3 ways we can spend money each month: We can choose to pay for the past, live in the present or invest in our future. By carrying credit card balances, you're allowing past behavior to influence your present and future.

Nancy Nelson, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Family Life

### Sitting is the New Smoking

Most of us live and work in a sedentary culture and studies show that sitting too much is taking a huge toll on our health.

Dr. James Levine, director of the Mayo Clinic-Arizona State University Obesity Solutions Initiative, has been studying the adverse effects of a sedentary lifestyle for years and sums up his findings this way. "Sitting is more dangerous than smoking, kills more people than HIV and is more treacherous than parachuting. We are sitting ourselves to death."

Many other researchers agree with Dr. Levine, and continue to find evidence that prolonged sitting increases the risk of developing serious illnesses that include heart disease, various types of cancer, and Type 2 diabetes. In addition, the effects of long-term sitting persist even if you follow other healthful habits.

It appears that the impact of movement, even leisurely movement, is profound. In addition to burning more calories when you move, the muscle activity needed for standing and other movement seems to trigger the process where the body breaks down fats and sugars. When you sit, these processes stall and your health risks increase.

Take a moment to analyze your typical day. How much time do you spend sitting? Think about time spent at the computer, watching TV, and driving or riding in a vehicle. Also consider time you sit while enjoying hobbies, such as sewing, knitting, crafting, and woodworking, watching a ballgame or reading.

So, how can we sit less and move more? Start by simply standing, rather than sitting, whenever you can, and do as many tasks as you can while you walk. Here are some tips:

- »» Stand while you talk on the phone, eat lunch or when reading the mail.
- »» Stand during webinars and conference calls.
- »» Use a standing desk for office work and other desk activities.
- »» Put the remote control next to the TV instead of next to you and stand up during commercial breaks.
- »» Walk to visit a neighbor instead of calling them.
- »» Take meetings out of the conference room — talk while you walk.
- »» Move the printer away from your desk so you need to stand or walk to retrieve copies.
- »» For every 30 minutes you sit, stand for 5 minutes. Set an alarm to remind you, or at the very minimum move every 60 minutes.
- »» Use the restroom on another floor of your office building or home, and take the stairs.
- »» Stand often while you watch a live sports event – get up and cheer for your team!