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## Bull Battery

As funny as some folks think the words “bull battery” sound, they need to be taken seriously. On cow/calf operations, bulls provide half of the genetics in a calf crop. And, bull fertility far outweighs cow fertility, at least if you consider that a bull should breed about 25 to 40 cows in a season, (about 1 for every month of age from 2 yrs. to 4 yrs. of age).

USDA data shows over 90% of commercial operations using only natural service to get cows pregnant. Nearly every operation could easily have just one poor-performing bull cause a lot of open or late bred cows.

Getting cows to conceive early in the breeding season is crucial to the long-term reproductive and financial success of an operation. Otherwise, more open and late-bred cows will result in a longer calving season. And, late bred cows will produce younger and lighter weight calves next year, reducing income.

On spring-calving operations, most bulls have been pulled from the cowherd (or at least should have been) by early fall. It's important that these bulls be given a period of post-breeding season “R & R” (rest and recuperation), particularly since it is common for bulls to lose upwards of 10-15% of their body weight during a breeding season (i.e. 200 to 300 lbs. on a ,2000 lb. bull). Each bull in your bull battery should be evaluated annually for health and ability to breed, including structural soundness and vigor. After culls are removed, bulls should be divided into two groups: 1) older and more dominant bulls that have decent body condition, and 2) young and thin bulls. It is important to separate bulls, since these two groups have significantly different nutritional needs.

Most mature bulls in good body condition can get by on a 100% forage diet, without additional supplementation from grain. A hay diet consisting of 7% CP (crude protein) and about 50% TDN (total digestible nutrients) will meet a mature bull's requirements, but only if he doesn't need to gain weight. A daily intake of about 1.5-2.0% of body weight (2,000 lbs.  $\times$  2% = 40 lbs./day; dry matter basis) should be targeted, and body condition should be monitored closely. In contrast, young bulls that lost weight during the past breeding season (but are still growing) often need to gain upwards of 2 lbs./day during the off-season. Older bulls that are thin due to significant weight loss also need to put on substantial gain, commonly 1-2 lbs./day.