



A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

## Bull Development

Bull sale season is in full swing and you may be shocked at the amount of money it takes to buy a new herd bull. The value of every animal on your place is astonishing, and to get new genetics that bring you the traits you are really looking for, well, you'd better be planning to spend some money.

After you spend that money and the bull is delivered, let's make sure that he can live up to his potential. That means we have to take care of these bulls nutritionally. Especially with young yearlings or even 18-month-old bulls, they are still growing and preparing for the upcoming breeding season. We can't get them in breeding condition by throwing them out with the mature bulls or by themselves and not looking at them again until turnout.

**These bulls need to be maintained on a high level of nutrition**, including protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals in order for them to be successful breeders in a couple of months. Protein required for bulls will vary, but around 10-13% protein would be necessary to keep him growing, putting on muscle, and priming the immune system. Energy required is going to be the most variable nutrient. If we get the bulls overly fat, then the fat in the scrotum can negatively impact semen quality. However, if the bulls are underfed, they don't grow properly and won't have the body condition necessary to make it through the breeding season as an active breeder or be able to cover all of the cows you expect he should. Bulls could lose 100-200 lbs during the breeding season, so we want those bulls to be in AT LEAST a BCS 5 prior to turn out.

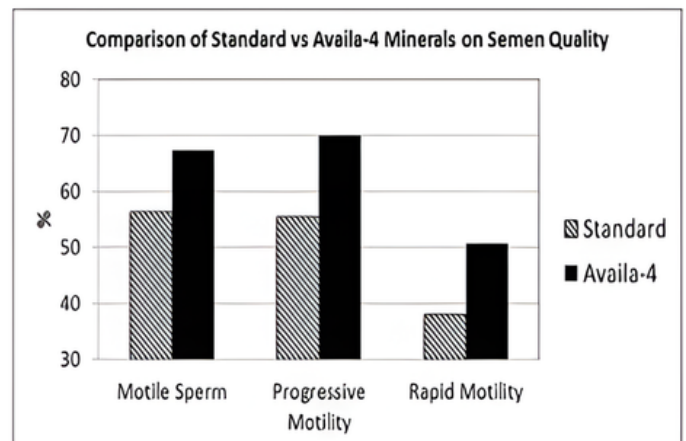
**Trace mineral nutrition is a critical component of bull nutrition.** Zinc in particular is required for semen production, and a lack of that mineral could result in more deformed or immature cells and poor motility at semen testing. Zinc and copper are both important for foot health, and there isn't much that will cause more problems with getting cows bred than lame or injured bulls. Remember, sperm production occurs 60 days prior to breeding, so we need to have those quality trace minerals in BEFORE bull turnout. And, if you test your bulls, you want to have good nutrition prior to that so you have the most accurate sample for evaluation.

**Trace mineral source can impact fertility.** A higher quality mineral source, like complexed trace minerals from Zinpro, help overcome mineral antagonism that can happen when we have high sulfates, iron, or molybdenum. Zinpro has conducted studies evaluating semen quality and found that bulls supplemented with the complexed trace minerals had more motile sperm and a greater percentage of sperm with rapid motility than bulls supplemented with standard minerals (like zinc sulfate and copper chloride). Products like Ultimate Breeder 8 and Stress Tubs supply Availa-4 trace mineral nutrition.

**It is a good idea to have all of your bulls undergo a Breeding Soundness Exam to help ensure a successful breeding season.** A Breeding Soundness Exam will include physical examination of the bull, examination of the reproductive tract of the bull, measurement of scrotal circumference, and semen collection and evaluation. Bulls that fail to pass a BSE are sub-fertile and will likely have an impact on the percentage of open cows that you get at pregnancy testing. If your bulls pass a semen test, there is a better chance that your cows will get bred. And, bulls should pass a BSE every year because their status can change because of injury, weather stress, or age. The veterinarian testing your bulls should be able to explain to you the criteria they use to determine whether they pass or fail a bull based on a Breeding Soundness Exam.

**In a Nutshell:**

- We need to supply good nutrition to young bulls
- Young bulls need at least 10-13% protein in a ration
- Bulls should be in at least a BCS 5 prior to turnout
- Trace mineral nutrition is critical for bulls
- Complexed trace minerals improve bull fertility
- Breeding Soundness Exams help determine fertility



Research by Wiltbank and Parrish evaluated pregnancy rates for over 2,000 cows mated to bulls known to pass a BSE or untested bulls and found a 5-6% increase in pregnancy rates when bulls passed a BSE. That may not seem like a high percentage, but when you think about the difference in the number of open cows you could have and the difference in value between open and bred cows right now, 5% is a big number.

Bulls comprise a huge amount of the genetics of your herd for the years to come. With the investment that we make in purchasing bulls for our herds, we need to hold up our end of the deal and take care of the bulls nutritionally so they can perform to their full genetic potential.

Pregnancy Rate after 90 days		
	All bulls passed BSE	Untested Bulls
Year 1	93%	87%
Year 2	90%	85%

Adapted from Wiltbank and Parrish, 1986

*Roxanne Knock, PhD*

### ***What do you need to be thinking about this time of year?***

- Get prepared for calving- get chains, OB sleeves, lube, and calf puller in place and colostrum replacement on hand
- Think about ramping up your mineral program for cows prior to calving, *ask about Ultimate Breeder 8*
- Consider having Land O Lakes Electrolyte Complete and Calf Insure on hand for stressed or scouring calves
- Scrape pens when possible to help avoid foot problems
- Set up an implanting protocol for calves to finish
- Get Stress tubs for the first and second calf heifers
- Feed Rumensin to the cows to improve feed efficiency and to limit environmental coccidia prior to calving
- Remember to get MGA if you are planning to use a synchronization protocol for your heifers to calve early

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