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VET CHAT

Bull Ready | Treatment Of Lameness | Non-Cycling Cows | Synchrony

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Are you Bull Ready?

A key factor for optimal performance is ensuring cows get in calf as early as possible in the mating period. This not only relies on resumption of normal reproductive cycles in cows after calving but also normal bull fertility. Studies in Tasmania and South West Victoria have indicated a large proportion (45-50%) of prospective dairy bulls have low or very low fertility. *Vibrio* was also a common finding in these dairy bulls.

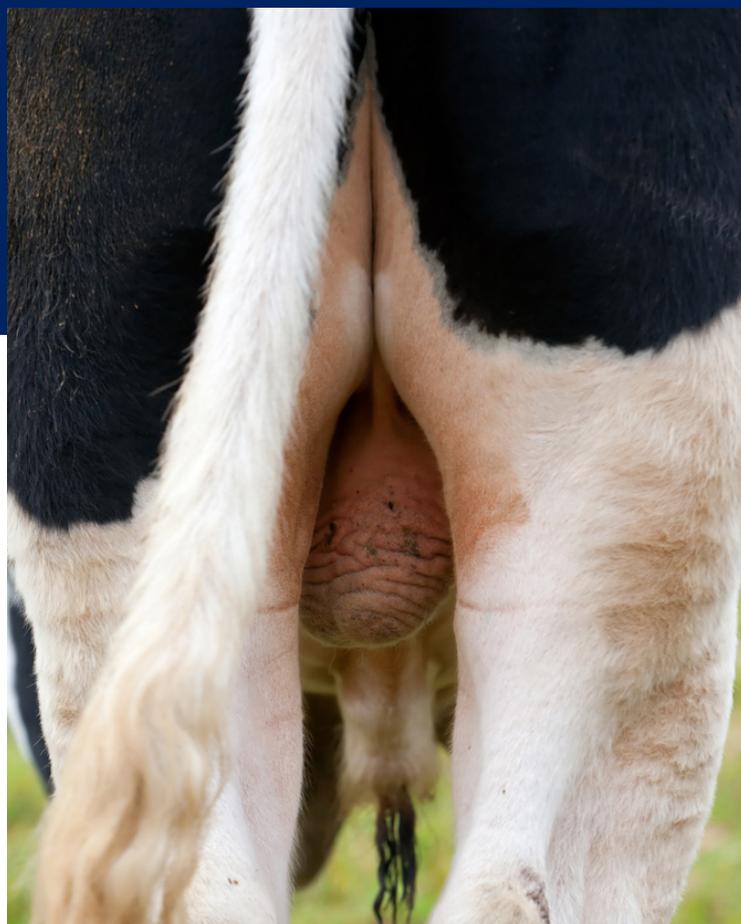
WHY DO BULLS BECOME INFERTILE?

The fertility of a bull is dynamic, meaning it can change from one period to the next depending on the conditions the bull is subjected to. There are many factors which can impact a bull's fertility. These include: nutrition and body condition; the presence of disease or injury; previous and current weather conditions; genetic predisposition of fertility; dominance within the herd; other stressors, such as handling and transport.

Where possible, incoming bulls should be kept with animals of similar age and stature. Bulls coming from very different geographic and climatic environments should be relocated much earlier than those animals bought locally. Some bulls are more sensitive to stressful events which can have a negative impact on their semen quality up to 2 months after the event.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH BULLS ARE FERTILE?

A full Veterinary Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluation (VBBSE) requires bulls to meet a set of standards for key fertility components. Passing these components increases the probability of the bull being fertile. Bulls should be tested 1 to 2 months before use to assess fertility.



THE COMPONENTS OF BULL FERTILITY TESTING ARE:

- **Scrotum** - Scrotal circumference (cm) and tone/resilience. The minimum values depend on breed and age of the bull.
- **Physical examination** - This evaluation will identify structurally unsound bulls in the head, legs, feet, sheath and penis.
- **Semen** - Crush-side assessment indicates that the semen is within normal range for motility, colour, progressive motility (%) and is suitable for laboratory evaluation.
- **Morphology** - Semen examination of the individual sperm cells using high power magnification to ensure minimum standards for normal function are achieved.

Call our clinic today to discuss how VBBSE can benefit your bull team prior to the mating season.

Treatment of Lameness

Lameness can occur as a result of injury, infection, excessive wear or overgrowth of the hoof. Lameness is painful and can reduce grazing periods leading to decreased production, body condition and poor fertility.

WHO SHOULD TREAT LAME COWS?

Your veterinarian is trained to identify and treat lame cows. Some skilled veterinary technicians and hoof trimmers can provide treatment. Farm staff can also be suitably trained in hoof treatment protocols. Ask your veterinarian for more information on treating lame cows before attempting it yourself.

WHEN SHOULD LAME COWS BE TREATED?

Early identification, diagnosis and treatment will improve cow welfare and minimise costs. Slowly and carefully move the lame animal into the sick herd or other suitable area as soon as lameness has been identified. Examine the animal as soon as possible (maximum 48 hours) to assess for the cause of her lameness. Serious wounds, dislocations or fractures require immediate veterinary attention.

WHAT EQUIPMENT IS REQUIRED?

Purchase the best equipment you can afford rather than select equipment on price alone. Good quality equipment and tools will last longer. Clean and oil metal parts before storing them away and sharpen hoof knives immediately after use. Restraint of the cow in a suitable cattle crush that allows safe access to the cow's front and rear legs is essential. Use good quality rope or webbing straps for restraining legs. Pulleys and a belly strap make lifting legs whilst supporting the cow easier and safer.

BASIC LAMENESS TOOLKIT

- Cut-resistant gloves and wrist guard made with Dyneema or Kevlar type material
- Hoof nippers
- Hoof testers
- Standard hoof knives – various types
- Hoof knife pouches (old teat-cup liners are adequate)
- Sharpening stone and/or Diamond hoof knife sharpener
- Fine round chain-saw file
- Methylated Spirits
- Cow slip or wooden blocks and suitable adhesive
- Appropriate antibiotic – must be prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Antiseptic spray
- Lameness treatment record sheet/book

Optional tools include a paring hoof knife, rasp, cordless angle grinder with sanding/cutting discs (for advanced users only).



BASIC LAMENESS EXAMINATION

- Check the general appearance of affected leg above the hoof for swelling, redness, wounds or discharge.
- Safely restrain the animal with the affected leg lifted for easy examination.
- Thoroughly clean any excess mud and manure off the affected limb and hoof, checking carefully between the toes.
- Using hoof testers, examine both toes by squeezing firmly over the entire sole area. Note any areas of sensitivity.
- Examine the dew claws and above/between the toes for pain, wounds, punctures, evidence of bleeding, redness, swelling, infection or abnormal growths.
- Use hoof knives and hoof nippers as necessary, to help identify and examine the cause of lameness. Look for black dots/cracks/lines which may lead to abscesses, ulcers or cuts.
- The use of a grinder must be done with extreme care and only by staff trained in its use.
- Completely remove any under run (loose) hoof and thoroughly clean the foot.
- Treat with a block on the sound claw if needed.
- Provide antibiotic medication and pain relief where appropriate. Paint the legs and udder of all treated animals with highly visible paint. Observe the required milk withhold for the specific treatment.
- Note lesion and severity on lameness treatment record and record date and treatment given.

Lame animals should be kept close to the dairy to allow them to rest and recover. Drying off or milking once a day should be considered for low producers/cows that are in poor condition. Frequently review lame cows to determine if they are adequately recovered to return to the herd. Some animals will need rechecking by the vet or hoof trimmer and others will need repeat treatments or humane euthanasia. The lameness incidence in your herd should be regularly reviewed. Lameness occurring more than 5 cases per 100 cows would indicate that lameness is potentially a significant problem in the herd.

Speak with our vet about treatment options for lame cows.

SERVICE

REDUCES LAME COWS VET SERVICE

Don't let your cows with overgrown, misshapen feet break down with lameness.

Use our professional, cost effective service to reduce lameness in your cows.



ASK IN CLINIC FOR MORE DETAILS

Managing Non-Cycling Cows

The earlier non-cycling cows are treated, the better the return on investment. Economic analysis has shown that it is more profitable to treat non-cycling cows as soon as possible, regardless of your calving pattern.



REASONS FOR NON-CYCLING COWS

Pregnancy: a surprisingly frequent cause for apparent non-cycling cows. All non-cyclers should be vet-checked prior to any treatment to avoid loss of a potential pregnancy.

Poorly grown heifers: failure to reach target weight at first joining and calving. Onset of puberty is influenced more by body weight than age.

Cows in poor body condition: aim to have cows calve at BCS 4.5 (1-8 scale).

Reproductive problems: cysts, infections or other issues with the reproductive tract can lead to non-cycling.

Other health problems such as lameness, can influence apparent cyclicity.

Cows are cycling but heats were missed.

Late calving cows are less likely to cycle in the first month of joining. Speak with your veterinarian about how to effectively manage late-calving cows prior to the start of joining.

WHEN SHOULD NON-CYCLING COWS BE IDENTIFIED?

Prior to the start of mating: using tail paint and pre-mating heat detection. Cows not showing any signs of oestrous should be treated 10 days prior to mating start date. They should then have their first heat at the start of mating.

All cows which have not cycled in the first 21 days of mating: these cows should be vet-checked as waiting for these cows to cycle on their own will cost you money.

TREATMENT FOR NON-CYCLERS

The main treatment for non-cycling cows is the Cuemate program of which there are various different modifications.

To decide the exact program and timing to treat non-cycling cows it is important you talk to your vet prior to the start of mating.

SERVICE

TREATMENT PROTOCOLS

Having up to date and accurate treatment protocols on your farm is important.

- Provides staff with the relevant knowledge to be able to recognise common diseases.
- Allows standardised treatments of common diseases using the most appropriate medication.
- Promotes antibiotic stewardship and observation of appropriate withholding periods to help prevent violative drug residues.



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Why synchronise?

Synchrony programs form an integral component of successful reproductive management in the modern dairy herd. Synchronisation involves the management of the cow oestrus cycle so that a cow may be bred in a controlled and planned manner.

SYNCHRONISING COWS CAN HAVE MANY ADVANTAGES INCLUDING:

EASIER HEAT DETECTION

Simultaneous display of heat by many cows enables easier detection of cows showing subtle or weak signs of oestrous. Heat detection aids such as scratchies, Kamars and tail paint tend to be more reliable when many cows are showing heat at the same time.

NB- Some synchrony programs have a fixed time for insemination and do not require heat detection for the first insemination. However, good heat detection after the initial insemination can be a critical factor to achieve overall good herd fertility. Good observation and application of heat detection aids are important for the full duration of the AI period.

EARLIER DETECTION OF NON-CYCLING COWS

Detection of heat earlier in the AI period allows those cows which are not cycling to be identified and therefore treated earlier. Pre-mating heat detection can also work well for some herds. Regardless, all cows that have not displayed a heat by day 21 into the mating period should be vet-checked. Delaying examination of these animals will cost more money in the long-term.

TIGHTER CALVING PATTERN

Breeding more cows over a shorter time frame can help tighten the calving pattern. The earlier cows calve, the more likely they are to get back in calf at the subsequent mating period. An increased number of earlier calving cows also increases milk production early in the season.

MORE HEIFER CALVES BORN EARLY

Early-born heifers have the advantage over later-born heifers in that they are more likely to achieve target weights for joining. Having a good replacement rate of heifers allows a greater ability to selectively cull cows with problems.

EFFICIENT USE OF LABOUR

On many farms, having a tight calving pattern allows more efficient use of labour and better observation of calving cows. Transition feeding is also easier to organise with groups of cows calving at a similar time.



ALLOWS USE OF ARTIFICIAL BREEDING IN HEIFERS

Synchronising heifers can also be advantageous:

- Early calving heifers (sometimes 2 weeks before the cows) can improve reproductive performance at the next mating period.
- Decreased number of bulls required.
- Increased genetic gain by using sexed semen.
- Efficient use of time and labour. Synchronising allows you to efficiently plan when you will treat and AI heifers without the need for constant heat detection. This is useful when heifers are not close to the dairy.

WHY NOT SYNCHRONISE?

Synchronising cows or heifers is not a magic cure for an extended calving pattern. Synchronising may be part of the solution to the problem, but there are many other aspects to consider.

Synchronising alone is unlikely to help if:

- Cows are only recently calved.
- Cows are in extremely poor condition and are not cycling.
- Heifers are poorly grown and are significantly below target weight.
- There are limited resources to handle a large number of cows and heifers calving over a short time next year.

You should discuss the benefits and costs of synchronising with one of our vets before deciding if it is the best option in your case.

APIAM DAIRY SERVICES CLINIC NETWORK

Border Veterinary Clinic: Cohuna, Leitchville, Barham, Kerang
Deniliquin Veterinary Clinic
Echuca Veterinary Clinic
Finley Veterinary Clinic
Gippsland Veterinary Hospital: Maffra, Sale

Gympie Veterinary Services: Gympie, Tin Can Bay
Kyabram Veterinary Clinic: Kyabram, Nathalia
Scottsdale Veterinary Services
Smithton Veterinary Service
Terang & Mortlake Veterinary Clinic: Terang, Mortlake
Warrnambool Veterinary: Warrnambool, Nullawarre, Koroit, Port Fairy



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