

## Remember the Bull when Winter Approaches

Winter hasn't shown its true strength yet this season, but we can safely assume what may be in store down the road, cold and snowy days followed by even colder nights. By now, many if not all spring born calves have been weaned off their mothers and all are settled into feeding groups for the winter. Bulls are on their own, away from the cows, and are at the point of some of their lowest nutritional requirements. Although this time is often the point of minimal maintenance, producers still need to remember the bull, and what they do now will have an effect on his breeding success next season and beyond.

Winter brings many nutritional challenges for many beef operations. Producers try to maintain body condition scores (BCS) on their cow herds and hopefully bump up young stock as they face their first calving season or are still growing into their own frame as calves. But bulls also have an uphill battle that needs to be addressed. Many times, during the breeding season bulls will lose weight and could drop BCS. Winter and the time bulls spend away from the cows is an opportunity to gain weight and BCS back.

Bulls require adequate nutrition to keep condition over winter. Colder weather could require extra feed to help maintain body condition but also maintain proper body temperature. Similar to other livestock on your operation, younger bulls require more nutrients because they are still growing until they reach approximately 3 years of age, rations should be formulated to address nutrient needs for expected gain and maintenance of bulls. Feeding minerals over winter is also very important to help balance any deficiencies that might occur in the feed being fed. Testing feeds and consulting with a nutritionist can help solve feed and nutritional concerns.

Establishing dominance and creating a pecking order is important for bulls. This should be monitored and accounted for if you house multiple bulls on your operation. Consider separating them to reduce injuries, prevent fighting, and to ensure that each animal is getting its share of feed. If not, older, stronger, more dominant bulls could become over conditioned. This could decrease fertility during future breeding seasons.

Proper housing and bedding should also be considered during the winter months. Pens should be large enough to allow bulls to move and exercise throughout the day and for pen mates to separate. Bedding should be provided in wet lot/pen scenarios. Bedding can provide thermal support for body temperature regulation and can aid in the prevention of frostbite of the bulls' testicles. Frostbite can damage the testicles by killing tissue that helps regulate temperature in the testis, this could decrease bull fertility come breeding season. When providing bedding, try to keep mud and manure depth less than ankle deep to prevent buildup on hides of animals.

Remembering the bull is critical during winter if you expect him to do his job when he meets the girls. Keeping the bull in good body condition and stamina can help when the breeding season comes. Keep in mind the nutritional, animal husbandry, and overall management needs of the bull now to increase your probability of having calves on the ground in the future.

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