

Management of Yearling Bulls

What do you do after you bring them home?

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You have just made a sizable investment into your operation not only financially, but also in the genetic and reproductive performance of your cow herd. In order to realize the full potential of your investment, you should also invest in management, feed, and care of the bull once you bring him home.

Pre-breeding Management

Bulls should be purchased well in advance of breeding season and ideally the bull should arrive 60 days prior to the start of the breeding season. The bull needs time to adjust to a new environment, overcome stress of sale, and overcome stress of transportation to farm. If bulls are carrying some excess condition, this is not detrimental to bull development, however, prior to the breeding season bulls should get into shape for the work ahead. Yearling bulls should gain about 2.0 lbs per day. Therefore, producers should provide a ration, which contains 11-12% crude protein and 70% TDN to meet the needs of the bull. This can be met with medium quality hay or access to excellent quality pasture, but may also require supplementation with grain or grain co-products to meet energy and protein requirements of the growing bull. Producers should consult a nutritionist or county extension agent to help formulate the ration or supplement to meet the bull's nutrient requirements.

Exercise is critical factor during this period, to prepare the bull for the breeding season. Bulls need to have a lot of stamina, be very athletic, and able to travel many miles each day during the breeding season. As with any athlete, physical fitness does not occur overnight. You should provide an exercise lot of approximately 1 to 2 acres in size and if provided this space the bull has a natural instinct to exercise himself. Bulls that are physically fit will have a higher degree of sexual drive and will remain sound. If this is the only bull at your farm, you should provide a companion animal, such as steer to aid in exercise. Also check fences and facilities to ensure the bull will not easily get out as well as make sure there is a buffer zone between the

bulls and cows/heifers. If you are introducing the bull to new bull(s), he was not housed with previously this period is also needed for the bulls to adjust to one another.

Breeding Season Management

A primary goal is to get the cows pregnant as early as possible in the breeding season. The bull to female ratio is important in attaining these goals. However, this is difficult to accurately define because it is affected by so many other factors such as distribution of females in the pasture, individual bull characteristics and management decisions made by the producer. However, the "rule-of-thumb" for the proper bull to female ratio is one cow per month of age of the bull up to 3 years of age. For example, a 15-month old bull could be run with 15 females and 36 cows could be exposed to a 3-year old bull (36 months of age), thirty six cows is the maximum number that should be allotted to a mature bull.

Age of Bull	No. of Females Exposed
12-15	10-12
15-18	12-18
18-24	18-25
24 mo. & older	25-40

The young bull is still growing, and therefore may need to be provided some extra feed during the breeding season. Monitor the bull's body condition and increase amount provided, if the bull is starting to lose condition, but also do not let the bull become too fat. Observe the bull closely during the breeding season to ensure the bull is serving the females. Ideally observing the cows once to twice daily. If possible record the date in which the females appeared to be serviced, then watch these females approximately 15-25 days later. This is time period the females would be expected to be cycling again, if they were not bred previously. Also monitor the bulls for injuries during

the breeding season. If problems are identified early, this will allow you to fix the problem before too late. And if the problem is identified late in the breeding season this could result in a low pregnancy rate and extend your upcoming calving season.

Post-Breeding Management

The care provided to yearling bulls after the breeding season is critical if they are going to continue to have a long and productive breeding life. However, sadly most bulls do not receive the proper care on most commercial beef operations.

The producer should be concerned with the following items during the "off breeding season".

1. Evaluate the bulls' condition and, if needed, feed and manage them in such a way that they will be in moderate condition, a body condition score of 6 at the beginning of the next breeding season.

2. Feed and manage yearling bulls so they achieve 65 to 75 percent of their mature size by the beginning of the next breeding season.
3. Prevent injury. Do not place young bulls in the same pens with older bulls that will physically dominate them. Additionally, keep the lot free of materials that could possibly cause injury such as wire, farm equipment and boards with nails. Again, you might want to consider a companion during this period.

Resources:

Yearling Bull Management, J. Neel and N. Schrick, University of Tennessee Info Series: AS-B-226. <http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu/beef/pdf/YEARLINGBullManagement.pdf>