

Beef Breeders Urged Not To Discard Bulls Failing 1 Semen Test

A beef cattle breeder could easily be tossing hard-earned money down the drain if he sends a bull to the slaughterhouse just because the bull fails a single semen test.

ARS research indicates that microscopic evaluations of bull semen can help predict the average fertility of groups of bulls — but not the fertility of an individual animal.

This conclusion is based on semen evaluations of 232 Hereford, Angus, and Short-horn bulls in studies at Fort Crawford, Nebr., by beef cattle researchers of the Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station.

The scientists rated semen collected by electrical stimulation on the basis of motility of sperm, concentration of sperm, and percentage of dead and abnormal sperm. Many

commercial breeders use this type of semen test on their bulls prior to the breeding season. However, there is considerable controversy over whether tests of semen collected by electrical stimulation reveal the type of semen produced later in natural matings with cows; and, if so, how great a relationship exists between appearance of sperm and their fertilizing ability.

Based on their semen evaluations, the scientists divided the bulls into "good" and "poor" groups. Within 3 days of the last evaluation, these bulls were mated to feedlot heifers. Results of natural matings and of the semen quality tests were consistent in comparing groups of bulls. One group of 10 "good" bulls successfully bred 67 percent of the heifers to which they were mated. A group of 5 "poor" bulls demonstrated only 45 percent fertility.

When applied to individual bulls, the "good" or "poor" labels were meaningless. One

"poor" bull proved to be more fertile than 6 of the 10 "good" individuals; one "good" bull actually bred only 43 percent of the heifers to which he later was mated.

The semen test successfully predicted complete sterility in two bulls. No sperm was detected in their semen samples, and both were mated to 15 cows without a single conception. The same bulls, however, were remated a month or more later, and conception occurred in about 75 percent of the heifers used. The scientists speculate that the bulls had not reached sexual maturity at the time of the first breeding trial.

The researchers found, also, that semen from many bulls varied considerably in make-up from week to week. In the course of three weeks, 22 percent of the bulls changed 20 percent or more in overall fertility.

The scientists examined 11 specific indicators of semen quality, including seven types of abnormality such as sperm with coiled tails, lost tails, or abnormal heads. Individually, or combined into weighted

House Plants May Need Special Summer Care

You needn't worry about your house plants during a short vacation, according to Dr. Charles Dunham, associate professor of horticulture at the University of Delaware. If you will be away two weeks or less, just give the plants a little special care before you leave. However, if you plan to be gone for more than two weeks, ask a friend or neighbor to water the plants for you.

To care for plants during a snort vacation soak them thoroughly the night before you leave, Dunham suggests. Place the plants in a few inches of water in a pan, or in the bathtub, if there are quite a few plants. Never go away and leave the plants in the water, however, they may die. Put the soaked plants in

plastic bags just before leaving. If there are many plants, place them close together with a large plastic bag over them. Tuck the bag under the pots so the plants are completely covered.

This procedure keeps the plants in a humid atmosphere and prevents water evaporation from the soil.

The plastic-covered plants must not be placed in the sun, Dunham warns. They would bake to death. Instead, put the plants away from the sun or in the basement.

There may be a few yellowed leaves on the plants when you return home. But with normal care, they will soon recover.

Most of the people of the world spend half their disposable income for food. Americans spend about one-fifth. We have more income left for the products of industry, for housing, for medical care, education, and recreation.

equations, these characteristics proved to have little value for predicting a bull's fertility.

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