

The Bull

It is important to health-check and quarantine all animals which enter your herd. This applies most especially to the bull. Because he has intimate contact with all breeding females in your herd, the bull has to be kept free of disease – he is ideally placed to spread infection/illness throughout the herd.



In order to physically serve cows, the bull has to be kept fit and well – infection/illness could reduce his ability to do so.

In order to produce high quality semen, the bull has to be kept free of disease – infection/illness could reduce his ability to do so.

Buying a bull is a big investment – their health has a major effect on overall herd fertility. A little time and effort to make sure they are fit, free from disease and actively working will pay dividends.

Before you buy

Don't buy a bull the week before you need him. Aim for at least one month before the breeding season starts.

Ask the vendor questions about animal....

What vaccines (if any) has the bull got?

When were they given?

Does his herd have a BVD/ IBR/ Johnes' management programme in place?

Is there any certification of such?

Has the bull ever served any cows/heifers.

Where? When?

On Arrival

Quarantine new bulls for at least four weeks after their arrival.

This quarantine period can be used to observe for feet, leg, back, and eye problems and for infectious disease.

The bulls should be treated for internal (worms, fluke) and external (lice, ringworm) parasites now.

This is also a good time for vaccination and adjusting him to any new feeding regime.

Test your bull 2-3 weeks after his arrival in your quarantine – if he is carrying an infection you want to know as soon as possible. Test before you vaccinate.



Tests

A single clotted blood sample can be used to test for:

BVD virus – to test if the bull is a [PI animal](#) and therefore unsuitable for breeding.



BVD antibody – to test the level of antibody to BVD virus. Antibody generally indicates immunity to the virus. If the result is negative, talk to your vet about whether or not BVD vaccination is warranted.

IBR antibody (gB) – to test the level of antibody to IBR. Antibody generally indicates a potential IBR carrier (see). Once infected with IBR, animals remain so for life and are potential shedders of the virus when

stressed. A hard-working bull may be considered as being under stress during peak service times. If the result is positive, be sure about the bull's vaccination history and talk to your vet about IBR control in your herd. If the result is negative, talk to your vet about whether or not IBR vaccination is warranted.

The same blood sample can be used to test for **Johne Disease** and **Leptosporosis**. It makes good sense to get your new bull tested for these diseases too before he enters the herd proper.

Send all samples to the CVRL (Backweston), clearly marking the submission “**BREEDING BULL**”.

WAIT until you get the results before introducing the bull to the main herd – assume nothing

Any disease, which gives the bull a fever will reduce the quality of his semen, perhaps taking months to recover. Poorer quality semen means lower fertility for your herd.

It is well worth considering vaccinating your breeding bull to help prevent this.

Vaccinating against BVD, BRSV, PI3, Leptospirosis, IBR (see) in addition to blackleg, will cover against the most common causes of fever. Annual boosters are sometimes required. Talk to your vet about what is needed on your farm.

If a bull breaks out and enters another farm, he will have done so with the view to making contact with their cows or heifers. It would be wise to quarantine him for at least three weeks and test him for the above diseases before setting him back to work.

When investigating any infertility problem in your herd, always include blood samples from the bull, as well as the cows.

