

All the latest news and advice from our expert team

Farm news

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Bull Pre-Breeding Examination

The importance of bull pre-breeding examinations

We understand that ensuring your cows are in calf is vital to ensure business can continue successfully.

Did you know that 1 in 4 bulls in the UK has sub-normal fertility? This could be due to small scrotal circumference, poor semen quality (motility or morphology) or poor serving ability.

The definition of a 'fertile' bull is one that would be expected to get 60%, within 3 weeks, and 90%, within 9 weeks, of 50 normal cycling cows pregnant.

It takes approximately 60 days for new sperm cells to be produced, so an incident or injury involving your bull could affect his mating abilities. As such, a full history of the last 60 – 71 days is useful when assessing fertility.

Fertility is also affected by age. Studies have shown that a higher percentage of bulls fail the test when conducted <15 months of age (mounting behaviour or scrotal circumference is not a finite indicator of sexual maturity), also that once bulls are over 4 years old the percentage of bulls that pass the pre-breeding exam reduces significantly each year.

So, how can we help to make this happen?

We can perform pre-breeding examinations 8-10 weeks before a bull is put to work, to help identify under performing, sub-fertile bulls. This examination can also help to estimate how many cows may be successfully served, giving you a better idea of what numbers to run the bull with.

What does the process involve?

Electro-ejaculation (EEJ) is the standard method of semen collection. This procedure is carried out by a specially trained veterinary surgeon who has undertaken additional training to gain a certificate in the process. It usually takes around 60 minutes and is a safe procedure if an appropriate crush is available.

For more information call our practice on **01332 294929** or email farmandequine@scarsdalevets.com

The vet will conduct a physical inspection of the bull, including a general health check as well as checking scrotal circumference, examination of the penis, prepuce and sheath, plus palpate the testicles to ensure all is up to standard. Where appropriate, breed standards, agreed with the breed societies, are used.

Once the semen sample has been collected it will be tested on-site (a power source is required) for motility – the capability of sperm movement. This will allow a general idea of how the bull will perform. An additional sample can be carried out within the same pre-breeding examination if the first sample is showing suboptimal results.

The remainder of the tests (such as analysing morphology – the size and shape of the sperm) will be done at our lab where we offer a quick turnaround of confirmation of results.

A certificate will then be issued based on the physical examination and sperm examination performed on that day. If required, a 3rd stage can be added to assess mating ability, but this is usually only done in special cases.



What facilities are needed?

To safely perform a bull pre-breeding examination we ask that all clients have:

- A safe, working crush of a suitable size for your bull. The bull needs to be able to move gently side to side during the test
- Access to mains electricity to allow us to set up our on-farm laboratory (this needs to be undercover)
- Sufficient staffing to safely move the bull into the crush
- Space to watch the bull walk into the crush

Additional benefits of carrying out a bull pre-breeding examination?

It may be that you're looking to move a bull on and wish to prove its breeding expectations to increase value. We can carry out a pre-sale PBE so the bull can be sold with the certificate confirming fertility probability.

 **Scarsdale Vets**
Farm

scarsdalevets.com

A Staggering Thought

We often think of hypomagnesaemia (better known as 'grass staggers') to be something that only affects adult cattle at grass in the spring and autumn – but did you know that your milk/milk replacer fed calves can also suffer?

Like with adults displaying signs of staggers, 'milk tetany' occurs when calves have an inadequate dietary intake of magnesium. Milk in general has a low magnesium content but can support the requirements of a calf up to around 50kg bodyweight; after this, if milk is the sole diet, magnesium levels could be inadequate. Calves are most susceptible to milk tetany at around 3 months of age as this is when the gut becomes less efficient at absorbing the magnesium from the milk.

Clinical signs include head shaking, uncoordinated movements, and unusual ear positions, progressing to muscle twitching, kicking at the belly and foaming at the mouth.



Emily Sycamore
BVetMed CertAVP MRCVS

Further progression of signs leads to convulsions which can ultimately culminate in death. Treatment involves the administration of specific amounts of magnesium (care should be taken here as an overdose of magnesium can also cause death).

As with many diseases, prevention is key and providing a high magnesium content hay (e.g. alfalfa) can really help, and occasionally additional supplementation of magnesium throughout the first few months of life is necessary.

Thankfully milk tetany is relatively uncommon but it is certainly worth making sure you are aware of the signs.

Barren Ewe Blood Sampling Day

Wednesday 4th May 2022

£30
+VAT

Join us at our Barren Ewe Blood Sampling Day!

Bring up to 6 barren or aborted ewes (unvaccinated) to our Markeaton practice to be tested for Enzootic Abortion and Toxoplasma.

Sampling will help you, alongside our vets, create future breeding/vaccination plans!

Save over £130!

Booking is essential,
call: 01332 294929



Bull Breeding Exam Price Review

You have spoken, and we have listened!

Client feedback indicated that our pricing for Pre-Breeding Examinations of bulls needed reviewing, so we have made the decision to not only drop the price of the single bull test, but to also offer a significant discount for a second or third bull tested on the same farm on the same day. This applies to both dairy and beef bulls.



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