

Livestock Links

A Statewide Newsletter for Alabamians

Summer 2010

Restarting the Wiregrass Bull Test

Darrell Rankins Jr., Extension Animal Scientist

The Beef Cattle Improvement Association Wiregrass Bull Evaluation is unique because bulls are evaluated under grazing conditions. The original test began in the late 1980s at Wallace College in Dothan. Shortly thereafter, the test was moved to Roan Grantham's farm in Houston County. After several years, it was moved to Phil Farris's farm in Coffee County. This fall, it will begin at its fourth location. The test is still in Coffee County, but will be managed by Advance Genetic Resource, LLC. This is a partnership between Max Bozeman Jr. and Larry Reeves.

Both of these cattlemen bring a wealth of cattle experience to the new venture. Reeves has a brood cow operation and poultry houses. He is the vice president of the Coffee County Cattlemen's Association. Bozeman also operates a brood cow operation along with several other agricultural enterprises. Bozeman is a past president of both the Coffee County and the Alabama Cattlemen's associations and currently serves on various boards of the National Cattlemen's Association. Both men are long-term members of the agricultural sector of the Wiregrass region of Alabama.

The rejuvenated Wiregrass BCIA Forage-Based Bull Evaluation will begin on Nov. 17, 2010, when the next crop of bulls arrives at the test site south of Elba. The bulls will be acclimated to



Max Bozeman Jr. and Larry Reeves

their new surroundings and the other bulls for 2 weeks, and the test will start Dec. 1. Because this is a forage-based test, this start date is subject to adequate forage accumulation. Likewise, the ending date is set as April 27, 2011, but is also subject to change as weather conditions affect forage availability. The goal is to be able to get 100 to 150 bulls consigned to the test. During this test period, they will be targeted to gain 3 or more pounds per day on grazing only. Once the test is concluded, the bulls are developed through the summer and early fall at a moderate rate of gain so that they are in excellent body condition by the sale date: Oct. 22, 2011. At this point, they are 2-year-old bulls with abundant amounts of information about them and ready to go to work for cattle producers across the state. Mark your calendar now and make plans to purchase a top-rated bull for your operation.

Reeves and Bozeman would like to expand in the future and be able to sell consigned replacement heifers along with the bulls each year. This has happened in the past, but is not currently. If you have specific questions regarding the Wiregrass Bull Evaluation, call Rickey Hudson at (334) 693-2010 or Stan Windham at (334) 894-5596.

Small-scale Seedstock Bull Producers Have Big Challenges

Jonathan B. Gladney, Regional Extension Agent

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If you take time to look through your Alabama Cattlemen's magazine and see the number and size of seedstock producers advertising, you will find that more than 70 percent would be considered small-scale seedstock producers. For this

article, small-scale producers are those selling 15 bulls or less a year, medium-scale producers are those selling 20 to 40 bulls a year and large-scale seedstock producers are those selling 50 or more bulls a year. In scrolling through the magazine, we find less than 10 percent of the seedstock providers are in the large-scale seedstock category. These producers have much more total overhead costs; however, they have a great advantage in the bull selling market due to per head unit cost.

The number one problem for a small-scale producer is the cost of access to a commercial cow/calf bull buyer. The advertisements that catch more attention are the color full-page ads placed in the more popular beef cattle trade publications. This does not mean that smaller black-and-white ads do not work; however, the large-scale seedstock producers can spread the cost of more effective advertisement across more bulls. This would also be true for sale facilities and labor.

Another issue that comes into effect is that many large-scale commercial cow/calf producers believe finding bulls from small-scale producers takes too much time and that those small-scale producers are sometimes unwilling to stand behind their bulls when problems arise. Three large-scale cow/calf operators in Hale County shared stories of bulls they purchased from small-scale seedstock producers that had problems ranging from infertility to screwclaw. The commercial cow/calf bull buyers said the small-scale producers, in these instances, were difficult to work with in handling the claims. These particular individuals stated they like dealing with one person at a larger operation so they could build a relationship based on trust.

So what is the answer for these seedstock producers that are not willing or able to take on a large-scale operation? Some of problems can't be overcome, but three things have been proven successful for the long term are to be known for selling the best bulls around, always make the bulls good even if you feel that you probably shouldn't and do it with a smile, and be willing to align yourself with other positive-thinking seedstock producers to add numbers for selection and to decrease the per head unit cost of advertisement, sale facilities and sale labor.

In closing, the best examples of easily working together to lower that per head unit cost of advertisement, facilities and labor for a sale is the BCIA-sponsored sales. These sales are located throughout the state at various times a year. BCIA bull sales have various test, performance requirements, registration requirements and deadlines that give seedstock producers the opportunity to work with an animal science professional. The animal science professionals affiliated with the particular BCIA sale can, if asked, help you evaluate your marketing efforts and your animals.

BCIA sales and other consignment sales are excellent opportunities for seedstock producers to sell their animals. Selling does not happen when the auctioneer is running the bidding process with your bull in the ring; selling is what you do to get the commercial/cow calf producers to the sale to bid on your bulls. You have to build a relationship with commercial cow/calf producers. You are the one selling, so you have to meet them and spend time learning what they need so they will come to where your bull is selling.

Thought provoking exercise: Five minutes before your bull steps in the ring, take out a sheet of paper and write down the details of your marketing efforts. For example, who did you contact? Where did you go to make contacts? What did you do to get people to see your bull in the ring?

Evaluating the Health of a New Bull

Soren P. Rodning, Extension Veterinarian

Purchasing a new bull is a big investment with long-term consequences, both financially and genetically. As a result, bulls are often appropriately evaluated based on breed, expected progeny differences (EPDs), physical soundness, genetic analysis, visual appraisal and other things. But how much consideration is given to some of the unwanted diseases that a new bull can bring onto the farm? With all the time, effort and financial investment involved in purchasing a new bull, do not let him be the one to bring new diseases onto your farm, jeopardizing not only his health, but also the health of the entire herd. Below are some diseases and things to consider when purchasing a new bull to minimize the risk of introducing several common diseases into your herd. Consult your veterinarian regarding specific recommendations, which will vary depending on age and location.

Trichomoniasis

Trichomoniasis is a bovine venereal disease caused by the protozoan *Tritrichomonas foetus* and is commonly referred to as Trich. Bulls can become chronic, asymptomatic carriers of *Tritrichomonas foetus* because the organism can live in the folds of a bull's penis and prepuce. However, when cows are infected during breeding, the result can be early embryonic death, abortion, pyometra (pus-filled uterus detected at pregnancy exam), or infertility, which has a negative effect on the reproductive performance and economic profitability of a cow-calf operation. Bulls only become infected after breeding an infected cow, so purchasing virgin bulls is a good way to avoid this problem. Nonvirgin bulls should be tested before the breeding season.

Johne's Disease

Johne's disease is a chronic infection caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis*. Clinical signs include gradual weight loss despite a normal appetite, decreased milk production in cows and manure that gradually becomes more fluid until it progresses into a severe diarrhea. Animals are typically infected with Johne's disease as calves, but do not show any clinical signs until after a prolonged incubation period (time from infection to clinical disease), often between 2 and 10 years. Such a long incubation period means that many infected animals show no outward clinical signs for many years, but they are infecting new calves every year during this time. No medical treatment exists for Johne's disease. A killed vaccine for Johne's disease is available in some states with prior approval by the state veterinarian, but the vaccine does have some limitations and side effects. It is best to have new bulls tested for Johne's disease. In addition to diagnostic tests, ask about the Johne's disease status of a bull's original herd to help avoid introducing the disease to your herd.

Anaplasmosis

Anaplasmosis is a disease characterized by progressive anemia and caused by the rickettsial organism *Anaplasma marginale*. Fever, anorexia, loss of body condition, decreased milk production, abortion, infertility, muscle weakness and depression are commonly seen with anaplasmosis. The disease is present in many parts of the United States and causes significant economic losses to the beef and dairy industries. Veterinarians in some parts of the United States are reporting more cases of anaplasmosis in recent years, perhaps as a result of increased cattle movement due to drought and other natural disasters. *Anaplasma marginale* is transmitted from carrier to susceptible cattle by biting flies and ticks or by items such as contaminated needles, tattoo instruments, and dehorning and castration equipment. Treatment of anaplasmosis is often too late once clinical signs are observed. However, animals that survive the initial infection will become lifelong, asymptomatic carriers. Have new bulls tested for anaplasmosis.

Bovine viral diarrhea virus

Animals persistently infected (PI) with bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVDV) are created when a fetus is exposed to the virus during the first half of pregnancy. During this time, the fetal immune system is not developed enough to respond to a BVDV infection. Most PI animals die by 2 years of age. Some survive for several years and constantly shed BVDV throughout their life, infecting the rest of the herd. Infection causes fever, diarrhea, respiratory disease, reproductive problems and much more depending on the age and immune status of the animal infected. Some PI calves are "poor-doers," while others may look healthy and grow very well, making it impossible to consistently detect PI animals visually. It is essential to test a new bull for BVDV-PI status before introducing him to the herd.

Vaccination

Ensuring adequate vaccination of a new bull protects the health of the bull as well as the health of the rest of the herd. At a minimum, bulls should be vaccinated against IBR, BVD, PI₃, BRSV, Leptospirosis 5-way, and Vibriosis (*Campylobacter fetus*). Bulls should be revaccinated 6 to 8 weeks before the breeding season so immunity is high during the breeding season.

Quarantine

Quarantine new bulls for a minimum of 4 to 6 weeks. The quarantine period gives bulls time to recover from any temporary illness associated with the stress of the sale or shipping and also allows time for completion of all diagnostic tests and a breeding soundness evaluation. The quarantine period also provides time to observe the bull for any other problems before introducing him to the herd. Do not remove bulls from quarantine until all diagnostic test results are complete and reported as negative.

Considering the big investment associated with purchasing a new bull, take a little extra time to protect the health of your herd.

Practical Bull Management

Darrell Rankins Jr., Extension Animal Scientist

The vast majority of the cow herds in Alabama are one- to two-bull units. In other words, one or two bulls would be sufficient for the number of cows in the herd. Many producers identify the lack of a place to put the bull as one of the major reasons for not having a controlled breeding season. This article will address the idea of managing the bulls as an integral part of having a defined breeding/calving season. This example will be based on a calving season of Nov. 1 through Jan. 15, but the approach can be adapted to fit any calving season.

The program starts by purchasing good quality bulls. Numerous 18- to 24-month-old bulls are sold each year, and you can purchase a good one for \$2,000 to \$3,000. As an example, assume that we purchased two bulls of our choice for \$2,500 each from the Wiregrass Bull Evaluation Sale in late October. The bulls are transported to our farm, and we put them in the bull pasture until breeding season.

The bull pasture for these two bulls should be about 5 to 10 acres in size. This should be considered the permanent bull pasture because, over time, they will paw out large holes and tear things up. After a few years of housing bulls in this pasture, it will be very rough. Also, the fencing is important. An ideal fence for this pasture would be four strands of barbed wire with a strand of high tensile electric wire on top and an additional strand offset on the inside of the fence at about 30 inches from the ground. Keep the two strands of electric wire well energized (greater than 6,000 volts) with a good fence charger and this will keep the bulls where they belong. This bull pasture also should be in somewhat of an isolated area relative to where the cows are most of the time. Eventually, the bulls will need to be fed some supplemental feed and an ideal feeder for this is an inverted tire. They are virtually indestructible, even by bulls.

Now that the bulls are in their pasture and awaiting the upcoming breeding season, it is important to be aware of their nutritional needs. Good hay and whatever residual forage is in the pasture should be supplemented with an energy-containing feed at about 1 percent of body weight per day. Some examples would include soybean hulls, corn gluten feed, corn and commercially produced mixed feeds. Start the bulls slowly and work up to the appropriate amount of daily feed.

In this example, the bulls would be turned in with the cows on Jan. 23 and removed on April 7. During the breeding season, it is important to watch for some breeding activity and rest assured you will only see a small percentage of the breeding taking place. However, it is important to see some activity to ensure that the cows are cycling and that the bulls are active and have sufficient libido.

After the breeding season, the bulls should be returned to the bull pasture and kept there throughout the nonbreeding season. Grazing and a mineral supplement would be adequate during this time period. Around Oct. 15 to Nov. 1, the bulls

would need to be supplemented to begin getting them ready for the upcoming breeding season. Now that the bulls are mature, supplementation at 0.5 to 0.75 percent of body weight would be adequate. In early December, the bulls should be given a complete breeding soundness exam by a veterinarian, and then repeat the cycle with a Jan. 23 turn-out date. If heifers are being kept as replacements, the bulls will need to be sold after two calf crops to prevent in-breeding, assuming that a different bull was used on the heifers for their first calf.

Following a quick and simple look at the economics, it costs about \$20 per cow per year to expose them to good quality bulls that have been adequately evaluated and managed. At current prices, we bought two bulls for a total of \$5,000, had a breeding soundness exam on each at \$30 per head, bred 60 cows two times and then sold the bulls weighing 1,900 to 2,100 pounds each for \$65.50/cwt. This is the current salvage value at the local auction market. Practicing a controlled breeding season using good quality genetics is a simple and economical management tool that will pay big dividends in the long run.

Calendar of Events

July 1-2	State 4-H Animal Science Contests, Auburn
July 12-16	State 4-H Horse Show, Montgomery
July 26-Aug. 1	Southern Regional 4-H Horse Show, South Carolina
July 31	BCIA Statewide Field Day, Auburn
Aug. 10	Grazing Clinic, Tuscumbia
Aug. 11	Grazing Clinic, Winfield
Aug. 12-13	Deep South Stocker Conference, Moultrie, Ga.

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