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Time to think about BULLS

With the next mating period on the horizon, now is an ideal time to think about your bull team. Making sure you have the right number of bulls is a low-cost way to get more cows in calf.

You need to allow enough bulls to run in two groups – one group with the herd, while the others rest. Groups should be rotated at least once a week. If you're synchronising your herd, large numbers of cows will be on heat within a few days. Run all the bulls at this time, then go back to resting and rotating.

The number of bulls required depends on herd size, calving pattern, whether AI is used and how many cows are in calf by the end of the AI period. As a general rule:

For *seasonal or split-calving* herds, **3 bulls / 100 cows** at Mating Start Date (MSD), or 4 / 100 if you're using synchronisation programs. If you're not planning on using AI at all, a bull team of **6 / 100 cows** is needed.

This includes spare bulls for rotation.

For *year-round calving* herds (not using AI), **2 bulls / 100 milking cows**.

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR BULLS IN TOP CONDITION:

- Have the bulls on-farm by MSD.
- Vaccinate, especially for *Vibriosis*.
- Rotate groups of bulls every week.
- Group bulls of similar size, age and temperament to avoid fighting.
- Use bulls aged 15 mths – 4 yrs.
- Always run at least 2 bulls with a small mob.

We're continuing to see the usual conditions for this time of year: mastitis, calving problems, lameness and calf scours. Cases of scours often increase in the second half of the calving period – as calf pens become more contaminated with bacteria, viruses and protozoa.

Remember that scouring calves can become dehydrated very rapidly. Electrolytes are a critical component of treatment (our preferred choice is "Bovelyte"). Once calves become more than 8% dehydrated, they lose their suck reflex and the ability to stand. Intravenous fluids can often make a miraculous difference to these calves. Visit the "Animal Care" section of our new website (www.moevet.com.au) for an information sheet on calf scours.

MASTITIS IN EARLY LACTATION

How many cases is "too many"?

More than 3 clinical cases in the past 50 calvings.
More than 5 cases per 100 cows in the first month of lactation or more than 2 cases per 100 cows in following months of lactation.

Remember that collecting a sample from clinical cases of mastitis (prior to treatment) can be very valuable. Samples may be stored frozen and submitted for testing if:

- A cow fails to respond to treatment
- There is concern about the type of bacteria involved
- There are more cases of mastitis than expected.

Without laboratory testing, treatment choice is generally based on the severity of mastitis and specific farm history (previous milk culture results and responses to treatment). Intramammary products are suitable when the teat canal is not blocked due to inflammation.

We've seen a couple of cases of "toxic mastitis" recently, where cows become systemically unwell as a result of severe mastitis. Prognosis for these cows is often quite poor. Treatment may include injectable antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and intravenous fluids.

Best regards from Andrew, Bridie, Jules and Staff at Moe Vet Centre.