

Genetically “Outdated” Semen Could Cost Producers

Farmers would not think of keeping seed around from an over-the-hill corn hybrid nor holding on to a chemical that was no longer effective, yet some producers retain outdated semen for their dairy or beef herds. Unfortunately, this can be a greased chute to genetic obsolescence, say animal scientists.

“It’s not unusual to see a nitrogen tank crammed full of semen that a producer has accumulated over several years,” points out Bob Benson, National Sales Manager for American Breeders Service (ABS), DeForest, Wis. “And this can really be costly.

“That older semen is probably from bulls which do not measure up to today’s rapidly-improving performance standards. As an industry, we are increasing milk production approximately 120 pounds per year through the new sires which are available. A producer who does not use the latest bulls is sliding backwards.”

Benson notes that “nitrogen tank bloat” often occurs after a salesman comes around offering a special deal on semen . . . if the producer will buy in volume. Unhappily, such deals are usually on bulls which can no longer cut it genetically. Although the farmer who buys such semen may never use much of it, he hesitates to throw it out because of his investment.

The overstocking of semen may also result when a producer believes he has spotted a hot young bull prospect and he wants to corner the market on the semen while the price is still relatively low. But this can backfire in two ways, says Benson.

“Later proof may show the bull is not so great, or he may be such a prolific producer that we can eventually sell his semen for less than the producer had paid in the beginning.”

Benson says there are a number of reasons for keeping a nitrogen tank lean and clean.

“On an average, most bulls are only listed for two or three years and then are pushed out by newer and better sires,” he notes.

Even if a bull’s semen rises in price as his popularity booms, there is little reason to stock up, says Benson. “Let’s say he goes from \$6 to \$30. That’s still a good situation compared to risking a large supply on a bull which may become outdated genetically.”

Benson recommends that a producer keep a running inventory on semen so he or she knows exactly what’s on hand at any given time. This awareness will encourage the discarding of outdated material.

“As he or she goes down that list of semen on hand, the person should ask, ‘Would I buy that bull today?’ If not, it will cost less to destroy it than to save and use it.”

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