



Beef Talk

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Wind, cold are a dangerous combination

Very cold wind, three four-letter words, took a bite out of much of the Northern Plains recently. Wind chills at -50° F sent sharp pains of cold, almost like daggers, against my face.

Cows don't freeze

I could not help wondering about the cows. I have never seen a frozen cow that wasn't dead. Healthy, living cows do not freeze. Cows stand on four legs that are totally exposed to the weather, but get along just fine. Cows will attempt to get out of the wind and lay down.

However, those cows don't freeze. They will stand on ice and snow while enduring temperatures well below what most people could survive, but life goes on.

Come morning, the cow will get up, get a good drink of water, find hay, eat and spend the rest of the day pondering and ruminating. The same is not true for calves because they have a lower freezing index.

Keeping bulls winter safe

Make sure your bulls are not left out in the cold. Bulls face the same challenges. Bulls have a scrotum that is designed to

allow heat out of the body and away from the testicles. The bull will not tolerate these temperatures without respectable bedding and wind protection.

Bulls exposed to wind and cold could be neutered by morning. More than likely, there will be enough testicular tissue left to make

good teaser bulls. However, since the sperm must exist at the bottom of the testis, any frozen testicles are pretty much irreplaceable.

Generally, the testis does not freeze and the damage usually is limited to the scrotum. Check all bulls

for scrotal swelling, which would be followed by the sloughing of dead skin. In such cases, the heat of the inflamed scrotum actually damages the sperm-producing and storage capacity of the bull's reproductive system, which generally renders the bull infertile for a couple of months.

All bulls should have an annual breeding soundness exam (sometimes referred to as

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a BSE). If breeding soundness exams have not been a practice within your operation, they certainly should be this year. Do the test in late March or early April. There will still be plenty of bull sales for replacement shopping.

Bull nutrition also is important. Bulls can gain 300 pounds (lb.) a year. Stunting their growth and expecting the production of several billion sperm cells in the spring is unrealistic.

Dry-matter intake (DMI) tables (*Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle*, Seventh Revised Edition) indicate that a 2,000-lb. bull should eat 32 lb. per day. As the bull adds weight, daily DMI could be up to 38 lb.

Add it up, and make sure your bulls are getting the right amount of a balanced ration for proper maintenance and growth. Check with your nutritionist.

In addition, keep an eye out for those bulls that have developed structural problems. Bulls can walk out of the fall breeding pasture, but a few good hits while getting reacquainted with the other bulls, plus a winter of very cold temperatures, can lead to structural difficulties that will prevent the bull from being an effective breeder. Watch the market and, when the time is right, send those bulls to town. Do your neighbor a favor and note that the bull is for harvest only.

Don't forget the cows

Well, this discussion started with cows and will end with cows. The cow survives and doesn't freeze, thanks to her ability to produce heat from the feed she eats. Interestingly enough, the modern cow is striving for efficiency, but the cow depends on the inefficiency of metabolizing the feed she eats to keep her warm on these cold winter nights.

Keep her full, and provide wind protection and she will survive quite well. And, we hope, she will meet a fertile bull following calving.

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Editor's Note: Addressing the past, present and future state of the beefcattle business, "Beef Talk" is a weekly column distributed by the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Agricultural Communication office. Ringwall is executive secretary of the NDBCIA, director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center and an NDSU Extension beef specialist. An archive of columns can be found at www.BeefTalk.com, and your comments are always welcome.



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