

News column for use week of July 29, 2024
Kaitlyn Hildebrand, Livestock Production Agent
River Valley Extension District
K- State Research and Extension
July 23, 2024

When to Remove Bulls from the Breeding Pastures

In agriculture, whether it is farming or ranching, there is a seasonal shift to the daily operations. For many, spring-calving commercial herds, summer often means that the cows, calves, and bulls are out grazing on summer pastures while producers are thinking about next year's spring calf crop.

For many producers, a 50- to 70-day calving season is ideal. Even though a short calving season is the goal, bred cows are worth more than open cows (ones who have not conceived) and so if we take the bulls away then we reduce the number of cows that will become pregnant. Bulls are often kept out in the breeding pastures longer than 60 days, but some plan to cull the females that got bred late in the breeding season.

However, there are times when bulls need to leave the pasture for other reasons than having a short calving season. As we move into mid to late summer, the forage quality starts to decline, and some nutritional needs of the bulls have to be met. Younger bulls may need to be separated off so they can be supplemented to keep them from getting too thin, especially if they are still growing. Watch all bulls out on pasture to make sure their body condition score is maintained to help them through the rest of breeding season and into the next one.

Another reason to remove a bull from pasture is for males in multi-bull pastures. There is always a risk that they will fight over the females that they hope to breed. If you drive out to the pasture and see a bull standing off alone and/or bulls avoiding breeding, they need to be removed from the pasture and replaced with bulls that can handle the job. Bull injury is a risk that can be avoided by reducing the number of bulls in the pasture. A good option is to leave one or two older bulls out in the pasture to breed the last few open cows to add value but lessen the risk of injury.

Sometimes labor availability is a consideration as to when bulls can be removed from the pasture. Evaluate the bulls when you are moving the herd for another reason, such as giving vaccinations or applying fly control. This way you can leverage the labor on hand to remove a bull from pasture if necessary. Even though many people like a 60-day calving season, it does not mean it has to be a 60-day breeding season and there can be flexibility as to when the bulls can be removed from the pasture.

If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the Washington office, at 785-325-2121 or khildebrand@ksu.edu.