Choosing a bull

John Dawson

We wish to announce that John Dawson is leaving the Willows Partnership.

John joined the Practice in 1986 after a short spell working in Devon. He then became a partner in 1990. After a very successful time working in the farm animal department, John has recently spent increasing amounts of his time and energy developing the training of clients and vets under the “Embryonics” banner. This innovative approach has created training opportunities across the UK and beyond - even as far away as Iran.

John left us on 1st May 2015 to concentrate on running this training business himself. We will continue to help and support him in the establishment of this enterprise which will be based at his Mere Farm premises in Weaverham.

We would all like to acknowledge the input John has given to the Willows over many years and thank him for everything he has done for the Practice. We wish John all the very best with his independent venture.

Purchasing a bull can be an expensive process, but the value that he brings to your herd should be worth far more than his initial cost. It is important to consider what you want from your bull before choosing him, and once you have chosen, to ensure that he is healthy and fit for purpose.

Estimated breeding values (EBVs) are a measure of the genetic potential of a given sire. There are a number of traits which are measured and the results are combined to given indices to meet specific breeding objectives. EBVs are designed to remove the effect of nutrition, and management and environment to give a best estimate of genetic performance of a bull. Look for accuracy values of greater than 75%.

Understand your market

Your production system will govern which traits you should be identifying as important. For instance, beef producers selling progeny at weaning, Calving Ease (direct), Birth Weight, Muscle Area and 200 Day Growth would be important.

For those producers finishing stock, 400 Day Weight is paramount and Fat Depth must be considered. Those breeding their own replacements need to also consider Calving Ease Of Daughters, 200 Day Milk, and Scrotal Circumference. Scrotal circumference is closely related to the fertility of daughters and they will reach puberty earlier.

For dairy herds considering a beef bull to maximise the value of surplus calves, looking at EBVs is also important. Priorities for Calving Ease, Low Birth Weights, and Shorter Gestation (Calving Value) are important to reduce costs associated with dystocia and also to reduce calving interval. In addition if the progeny are to be sold as young calves then 200 day weight is also important.

Fertility status

A fertile bull should be able to get 90% of 50 breeding cows in calf within 9 weeks. Producers with a tight calving period, including block calving dairy herds using a sweeper bull, need to know that the bull is going to achieve those targets. A subfertile, infertile or sterile bull will not achieve this and will result in costly extensions to calving interval.

Perform a pre-purchase examination. This usually consists of a thorough physical examination, including assessment of internal and external, sex organs, and a semen test. Your vet will obtain a semen sample via electro-ejaculation, and will assess the volume, density, motility of the...
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sample and assess sperm for defects. This should be performed 6-8 weeks before the start of breeding.

Health Status

Try to avoid bringing in disease. For closed herds this is often the only animal coming onto the unit, and the herd may be relatively susceptible to disease.

Establish from the vendor, their Johne’s status. This is difficult to test for in young animals, so the status with the herd of origin is of more use. Other infectious diseases, such as Leptospirosis, BVD, and IBR should be tested for, or vaccination status should be established. Quarantine your bull on arrival and treat him for internal and external parasites; fluke, worms and lice, and observe for any signs of lameness and disease.

Much of the information above is also relevant when buying replacement females and when buying in breeding sheep and rams. Speak to your vet for about what you need to look out for when next purchasing livestock.

Go-karting at Warrington

A great evening was had by all at the annual Willows speedkarting event at Warrington.

Congratulations to Andy Mitchell who came first, Jason Smith who was second and Andy’s grandson, Ayrtont Mitchell (perhaps named after a Mr Senna, given how well he drove!?) who came third and also had the fastest lap of the evening. A huge thank you too to Steve Sheridan from the pharmaceutical company Merial who kindly sponsored the food. Looking forward to next year already!

FOOT TRIMMING

Contact Steve Austin
01606 723200

Visit per cow
£12 – 4 feet £10 – 2 feet
Block – £9.50
Bandage – £2.50
No Call out fee for 12 or more cows

Congratulations . . .

. . . to Laurence and his wife Helen on the birth of their daughter Isabel on Sunday 19th April.

Hartford Office
267 Chester Road, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1LP
Telephone: 01606 723200

Alsager Office
(Now open 9am-12 noon on Saturdays)
The Point, Crewe Road, Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 2GP
Telephone: 01606 723200

Deva Vets Office
The Smithy, Chester Road, Aldford Chester CH3 6HJ
Telephone: 01244 670170

Hampton Vets
Post Office Lane, Hampton Heath, Malpas SY14 8JQ
Telephone: 01948 820345

Manor Court Vets
Church St, Tarvin, Chester, Cheshire CH3 8EB
Telephone: 01829 740216