

Bull Management

The Euro-Star index gives an overview of the genetic potential of an animal for various key profit traits.

It is intended as an aid in the selection of breeding stock to give a farmer extra information around an animal's genetic makeup. While the genetic index is an important factor in bull selection, it is not the only one. A bull will still have to be visually assessed for vital physical traits such as docility, feet and legs and scrotal development. There is little point in selecting a bull with a high genetic merit if it has a docility issue or poor feet and legs.

Doreen Corridan is a vet with Munster Cattle Breeding Group specialising in the area of health and fertility. She has also been breeding pedigree cattle for over 20 years and has vast experience in the area of stock bull functionality. Here is her advice on how to manage a young bull.

Purchase your bull well in advance of you needing him. This allows you to:

1. Acclimatise him to your farm.

Bulls suffer stress of relocation far more than females. Often females are sold in groups and bulls are sold singly. When the bull arrives on your farm, pen him with a similar or smaller animal and allow him time to get to know you and the surroundings. If young bulls are going to be working together, then group them together.

2. Vaccinate your bull with whatever you are vaccinating the herd for.

Bulls need to receive a similar vaccination routine to that which you are doing on your farm. If you are vaccinating for Lepto and IBR on your farm, you need to vaccinate your bull for these as well. The bull will need the primary and booster vaccine and allow one month post vaccination prior to service.

3. Avoid any major nutritional setbacks.

Currently purchasers are looking for bulls to exhibit their genetic potential at the point of sale. This is then resulting in a situation whereby breeders are feeding bulls to a fat score of 4 to maximise sale value.

This is resulting in poor semen quality for a period of 6-12 weeks. Purchasers need to manage these bulls nutritionally post purchase and reduce down the feed slowly at a rate of 15% per week. This will result in maximum performance.

4. Ensure he is capable of serving prior to being let run with females.

To ensure this, the bull needs to be introduced to small/medium sized cows fully on heat for an hour, repeat this until the bull can serve competently.

5. Get your veterinarian to fertility test the bull.

A fertility test is a very worthwhile exercise. The bull will be checked for his general health, his internal glands, external glands and his semen quality.

6. Get the correct ratio of bulls to cows

A bull in his first year should be presented with a maximum of 15-18 females to serve.

A common occurrence is an inexperienced young bull being presented with too many females and as a result, losing in excess of 1Kg per day in body weight and going temporarily infertile.

Monitor the performance of the bull

Monitoring can be achieved by either fitting the bull with a chinball or using scratch cards on the females. An early scan of the females is always recommended.

7. Feed the Young Bull

Young bulls need to be fed in their first season as they are still growing and developing. Limit the bull's first breeding season to 60 days.

This allows the young bull to recover.



Two of John's pedigree Angus cattle. On the left, Carrigroe Fawn, has a Replacement Index of €258. Sired by Loughlynn Ace (YNN) she is 6 year old cow with an average calving interval of 343 days after 5 calvings. On the right, Rathosheen Hugo is John's main stock bull. He has a Replacement Index of €129. These two are the sire and dam of Carrigroe Kian AA2064 (inset) who is one of the highest Replacement Index bulls on the Autumn GEN€ IRELAND panel. Straws are available through ICBF at 1850 600 900.

Q&A

Q. Can the Euro-Star Index of my young bull change over time?

Yes it can. The lower the reliability on the bull at the time of purchase, then the higher the possibility of the bulls index fluctuating in the future. If a young bull has well proven AI sires in his ancestry then the chances of major changes are less. A bull's index can be affected by his sire's performance, performance of relatives e.g. brothers and sisters and by the performance of his own progeny. Genomics will increase the reliability figures on young bulls before they are ever used for breeding and this will give farmers more certainty prior to buying a bull.

Q. Who should I talk to about getting my bull fertility tested?

Talk to your local vet about a fertility test and full physical examination prior to putting the bull to work. They generally cost in the region of €50-€100.

FARMER FOCUS: JOHN APPELBE

Milk and Fertility are key to output

Name: John Appelbe, Clonakilty, Co. Cork
Farming System: Pedigree Angus & Hereford Breeder. 4 and 5 Star Females:
Cows: 65 **Heifers:** 54
Stock Bull or AI: Stock Bull & some AI
Replacement Strategy: Breed my own.

Why did you join the BDGP?

The average Replacement Index of the herd is coming in at €130 which means the targets should be easily met in 2018 & 2020. We were genomically testing bulls anyway for pedigree purposes and now they are being done automatically as part of the scheme. I feel it will also take breeding to the next level in terms of using more science.

Do you feel it will deliver for the national suckler herd?

Milk and fertility are two key traits in the index and if it will improve these nationally then it will be a success. Improving output and in turn profitability is the name of the game and milk and fertility are integral to this. The dairy example has shown us how the application of the EBI has improved the national herd in traits like fertility and milk solids.

What traits are of most importance to your herd?

Temperament is the most important. Regardless of the quality of cattle, if temperament is an issue then the animals are not worth having. Milk is second. When I buy a bull I buy him to breed females first and foremost. It is relatively easy to compliment your cows with a certain bull afterwards, but if your cows don't have the basic



John Appelbe and family

requirements of milk and fertility then it's very difficult to breed anything into them. Ease of calving is third. Calving problems are something that everybody wants to avoid. What I want are calves that are small at birth and have exceptional growth rates afterwards. I have some others such as breed character but these are more for pedigree purposes and are less important to the commercial man.

What are the main things that you look for when physically assessing a bull.

Legs and feet are vital. A bull has to be functionally correct, particularly if I want to sell on sons of a bull for pedigree breeding afterwards. The temperament of the bull himself is also critical. I would also look at calving ease figures and the back pedigree of the bull to see are there any difficult calving animals in the bloodline. One of the big things for me is to get a bull that will compliment my cows and improve them.

DATA RECORDING

- All calves born from January to June are now old enough (5 months) to record calf quality and docility.
- Cows can be scored for milk and docility as soon as they calve.
- This information can be recorded online at www.agfood.ie, www.icbf.com, a farm software package or by postal forms.

PAYMENTS

The first round of payments is expected to commence in December 2015. To facilitate payments:

- Herdowners must return the complete number of genotype samples requested.
- Complete and return all survey forms for animals born up to 30 June 2015 before Tuesday 8 December.