



### Bull Testing

We have been testing bulls for fertility for about a year now. So we thought we would take a look at the results.

Why were bulls tested?

49 bulls have been tested. The reasons for the farmer requesting a test varied. Some suspected a certain bull might not be performing, often after some poor results at pregnancy diagnosis of the herd. Some farmers, often those with a tight calving pattern, have had all the bulls on the farm tested on the one visit. Some bulls have been tested prior to purchase to check all is well.

What happens when a bull is tested?

Bulls are examined physically to check they are sound and likely to be able to mount bulling cows. The testicles and scrotum are carefully examined and measurements taken of scrotal circumference. A rectal examination of the bull checks the internal sexual organs and also starts the “teasing” process. The prepuce is also examined for any abnormalities.

We use a bull probe, purchased from the USA, to enable us to collect a semen sample. This is a heavy torpedo shaped device that sits in the bull’s rectum. It is connected to a power supply that can provide a variable current to 3 electrodes that lie on the underside of the probe in close contact with the bull’s internal sexual organs. By using the probe we can gradually raise the level of stimulation in a gentle fashion until we have collected a sample.

Semen samples are visually assessed for consistency and then rapidly taken to the makeshift on farm laboratory (we can use the farm kitchen or office) for microscopic examination. First we check a sample for motility, hoping to see strong swirls and waves of movement. We then follow individual sperm under greater magnification to check they are swimming in straight lines.

Finally we stain prepared slides of the sample so that we can study them under high power checking 100 individual sperm for abnormalities. This last part of the examination is carried out back at our laboratory.

We have expected normal values for the components of the examination and the farmer is provided with a report on each bull examined. Bulls are classified as satisfactory or fail, or occasionally a retest is recommended. There may be some provisos in classifying certain bulls as satisfactory because they may have come close to failing a part of the examination.

So, what are the results so far?

29 bulls have been classified as satisfactory = 60%.

19 have failed or been recommended for retest = 40%

We have been surprised how many infertile bulls there are out on farm. Obviously we have in some cases confirmed the farmer's fears, but we have also unearthed some infertile bulls that have looked in rude health.

It is expensive to buy the quality bull we now require to produce a quality calf and we cannot afford to discover he is not working months down the line. We only charge £80 to carry out the first bull fertility examination on a visit and £60 for extra bulls on the same visit. We recommend you get your stock bulls tested 2 months before the start of the service period so that any duds can be discovered and replaced with time to spare. We have tested bulls belonging to farmers who are not our clients, but please speak to your own vet and do not ring us direct.