

Beef Newsletter

BULL BREEDING

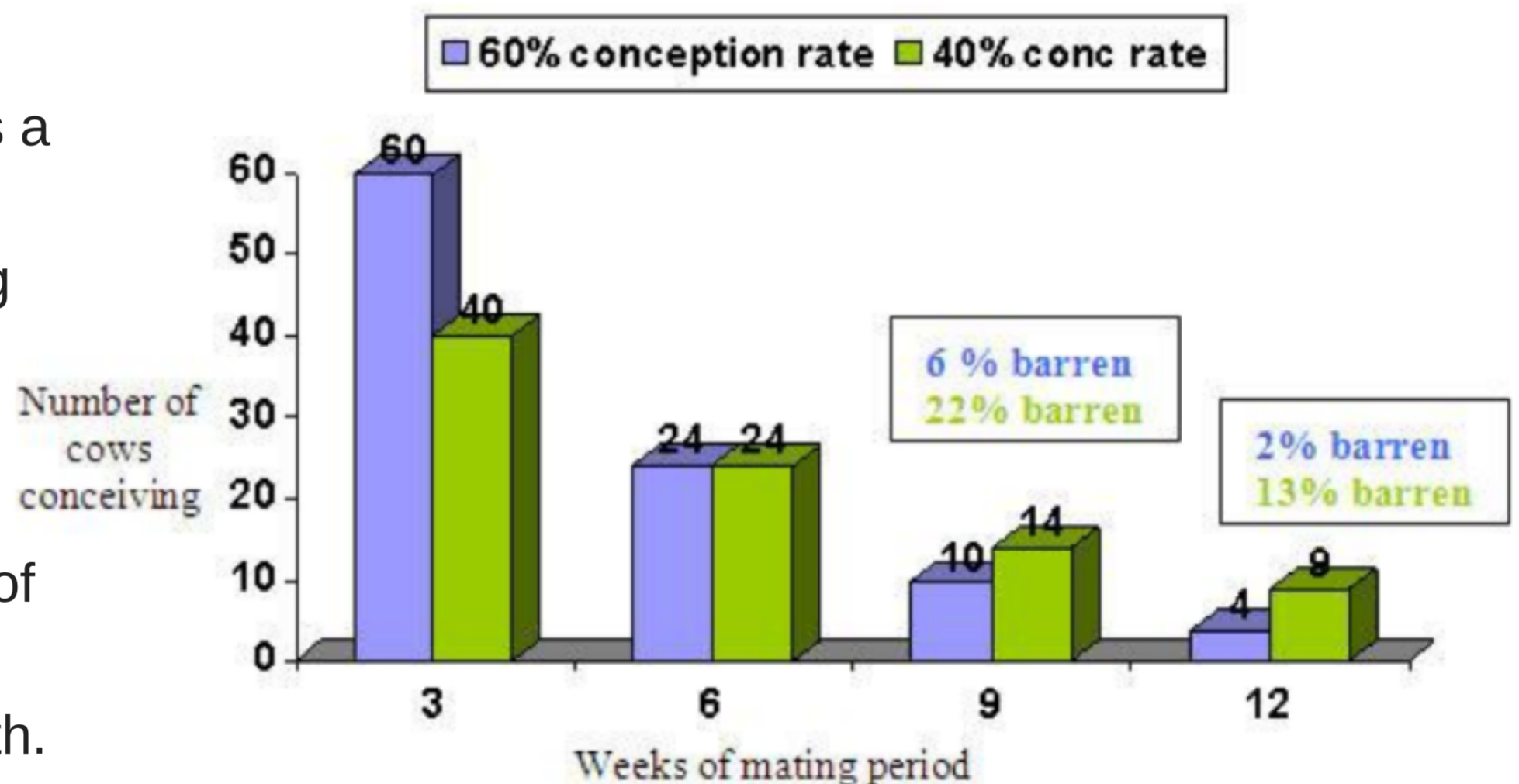
SOUNDNESS EXAMS



WINTER 2019

With calving season only just starting for some or a distant thought for others, most producers will not yet be thinking about the fitness of their bull(s) for the upcoming breeding season. Unfortunately, a good bull last season does not mean a good bull next season; past fertility performance does not always equate with future performance. The older a bull is the more likely he is to develop a physical or reproductive abnormality, which can affect his ability to get cows pregnant. Additionally, although a subfertile bull can get cows pregnant, such a bull will increase the length of the calving season, produce less pounds of beef per cow exposed, and lead to economic losses that could have been avoided. The graph below, from NADIS in the UK, shows a comparison of a fertile (60% conception rate per cow's cycle) versus a subfertile bull (40% conception rate per cow's cycle) over a 9- and 12-week breeding season. Overall, a fertile bull should get 94% of all cows pregnant after 9 weeks, and 98% after 12 weeks. A subfertile bull, though he gets cows pregnant, will get 78% of cows pregnant after 9 weeks and 87% after 12 weeks; this will ultimately cost you a great deal of economic losses. Imagine the losses associated with a bull with even worse fertility.

Bull breeding soundness exams/evaluations (BSE's) assess a bull's likelihood of getting cows pregnant in the upcoming breeding season and can identify subfertile and infertile bulls. On average, worldwide studies that evaluate outcomes of BSE's find that 1 out of every 5 bulls have poor semen quality, physical soundness, or both.



However, a study of BSE results in western Canada found that 1 out of every 3 bulls did not have a satisfactory result, which may indicate that the problem is even more prevalent in Canada where our winters are substantially more severe than in other beef cattle-producing areas. Are you willing to take the risk that your bull is not the 1 in 3 or even 1 in 5 that fail BSE's?

The BSE that we offer at Central Ontario Veterinary Services is comprehensive and includes the following components:

1. Physical examination – an overall examination of the physical traits of the bull, especially focusing on limbs and feet, body condition, scrotum characteristics, and a rectal exam to assess accessory sex organs. During the physical examination we also discuss the bull's past health and fertility history (if known).
2. Scrotal circumference – a measurement of the scrotum is a reliable indicator of a bull's fertility and sperm production; the measurement is compared to age and breed averages.
3. Sperm motility – a semen sample is collected via electroejaculation. The sample is immediately examined under a microscope to assess how well the swimmers are swimming.
4. Sperm morphology – the semen sample is stained and taken back to the office to assess under the microscope whether the individual sperm appear normal; a bull requires at least 70% normal sperm in order to pass a BSE.



Timing of a BSE is very important. Ideally, all BSE's should be completed at minimum 60 days before the intending breeding season. This is because the bull's body takes 60 days to make sperm, so if we find an abnormality during the BSE that we can treat, it will give the bull enough time to recover before the breeding season starts. As many of our producers will be turning bulls out with cows in the spring, we are offering discounted BSE's through the winter months to encourage bulls to be tested well before they are turned out with the cows. At Central Ontario Veterinary Services we strongly believe in the importance and value in conducting BSE's for our clients. If you have any further questions or concerns about BSE's or would like to book an appointment for your bull(s), please do not hesitate to contact the office at 705-722-3232.