

A group of black and white Belted Galloway cattle in a field. The central focus is a large black bull with a white belt, looking directly at the camera. To its left is a black cow with a white belt, also looking towards the camera. In the background, several other cattle are visible, some looking away. The setting is a grassy field under a bright sky.

# Don't Forget the Bull!

By Carolyn Ihde - UW Extension

Bulls have the greatest impact on a herd's genetic progress. Deciding to keep a bull for another breeding season warrants protection of this investment to ensure he is in optimal condition when returned to the cowherd. In order to protect your bull investment, implement a plan to ensure proper space and nutrition to promote young bull development and maintain mature bulls, provide protection in severe weather, and support the overall physical health of the bull.

Yearling and two-year-old bulls benefit from overwintering in separate spaces away from mature or more aggressive bulls. Yearling bulls are still growing and need additional nutrients to maintain warmth in the winter. Competing with mature bulls for feedstuffs is not ideal and they will compete for herd status, possibly leading to an injury. If separate lots or pastures for overwintering young and mature bulls are not feasible, adequate space at the feed bunk and loafing areas are vital.

Mature bulls should regain lost weight from the previous year's breeding season by consuming good quality hay, or the same ration fed to dry cows. Ideally, weight gain should occur before the coldest of the winter weather, which is the most efficient time for weight gain. Vitamins and minerals are part of a balanced ration. A reputable nutritionist can help formulate a balanced ration to make sure bulls meet Body Conditioning Score (BCS) targets. A BCS of 5 for both young and mature bulls is ideal and indicates enough fat cover to stay warm and healthy but not over-conditioned. Proper winter feeding will allow thin bulls to gain weight, young bulls to continue growing, and mature bulls to maintain a targeted weight, so all are ready for the next breeding season.

Drastic changes in temperature and weather conditions are of significant concern as bulls must maintain proper scrotal temperature to protect their sperm-producing ability. Windbreaks and shelters with clean, adequate bedding help provide protection and keep animals dry. Check for frostbite during and after extreme weather events. If frostbite has occurred, the scrotum will become enlarged, and frostbit areas may scab. Testicles damaged by frostbite could take up to 60 days before viable sperm production resumes. Performing Bull Breeding Soundness Exams (BSE) 60 days before the breeding season begins will ensure bulls have recovered from any weather-related issues or allow farmers enough time to find a replacement bull.

Bulls need to be physically fit during the entire breeding season to get cows bred. During the winter months, bulls need a large enough space to remain active and conditioned for the breeding season. Placement of water access and feeding equipment can provide exercise when placed at a significant distance apart. Routine cleaning of feeding and watering areas maintains safe footing and keeps the bulls coming to the feed bunk to eat with minimal risk of foot and leg injury. Well-planned winter facilities help prepare bulls for next year's breeding season.

The bull is vital to future beef operations. Proper nutrition will allow young bulls to develop into the mature bull you hoped, and mature bulls to continue contributing to your herd's progress. Proper winter protection and space provide conditions to ensure the bull will be free of injuries and physically fit. The calf crop two years from now seems like a speck on the horizon, but the efforts put in place during the winter months will help determine its success.

# Selecting a Belted Galloway Bull!

By Dwight Howard

Selection of the Belted Galloway bull is the most important task a breeder faces, and can be a very frustrating part of raising Belties. Because very little performance testing is being done on Belted Galloways, it has been more or less a visual decision as to which bull would do well in your herd.

First one must look objectively at his or her own herd. What are the weak points - poor legs and feet, sloping rear end, lack of muscle, small frames? If females in the herd are small framed, don't look at a bull with a large birth weight. If you are fortunate enough to find performance tested bulls, the bull's birth weight should not be over 80 to 85 lbs. However, 70 to 75 lbs. would be better to breed young heifers.

Look for 205-day adjusted weight of 500 lbs. or, preferably, 600 lbs., and 365-day adjusted weight of 950 lbs. This should be raised to 1,000 lbs. in the next few years. As to conformation, the bull's feet and legs are of first importance. A bull must have a good stride, no toeing out, and with a little set to the hind legs -- not straight. The bull should possess a straight topline, good muscling, and a head that is masculine but not huge. Testicles should be of good size and hang well below the body for top quality semen production. Probably ninety percent of Beltie bulls are underworked. About six females to breed is enough for a bull 16 to 20 months old -- this way they will have time to eat and put on growth during their first season. Soon after breeding is completed the bull should be put on a good growing ration so he will gain 2-3lbs. per day.

Most older bulls will not need grain after their breeding season, but their condition should be watched carefully. If a bull is thin a couple of months before his breeding season, grain should be given to put him in good physical condition. A mature bull should be able to breed twenty to thirty cows. It's a good idea to have the bull's semen checked for fertility before breeding season. This is a sure way to know if the bull has gone sterile or has a low sperm count, which can result in a year with no calves or very late calving.

So far as width of the belt is concerned, it affects only his appearance. The bull's belt will have little to do with the width of the calves' belts. We shouldn't breed for this trait alone, because it could mean losing many of the excellent characteristics of the breed.

Testing for infectious diseases, such as trichomoniasis, is not routinely included in the BSE. Visit with your veterinarian to determine if testing for trichomoniasis or other diseases is recommended.

