

With the increased push to join a large proportion of heifers for short joining periods in order to maximise herd fertility, there comes an increased bull requirement to service them. While in the past producers may have joined the 'better grown' portion of the drop to provide required replacements, producers are being encouraged to let the bulls do the selection in order to maximise herd fertility and condense calving dates. The use of yearling bulls is an economic way to achieve sufficient bull coverage when joining large numbers of heifers.

Yearling bulls (12-18 months old) can be joined at an age when they are leaner and physically exuberant compared to older bulls, and research has shown that with the correct management, these bulls can work for several years after their first joining. The younger bull also has time to settle into their new environment and location, rather than sitting idle at the breeder's, such as an 18 month old bull.

Using bulls as yearling is proven to increase their average working life, lowering the bull cost per calf over the working life of the bull. By first using bulls as yearlings, the working life of a bull can be extended by a year or more—a 25% increase. As a result, the purchase price and running costs of bulls can be spread over more calves.

While the use of yearling bulls has many advantages, they can and will lose condition over joining, depending on the length of the joining period and the number of females they are joined to. Yearling bulls will require extra nutrition post joining compared to mature bulls to maintain them in condition score 2 - 3. It is likely the bulls will not grow out to reach their genetic potential. However, the value of a bull should be measured by the performance of his progeny, not on what he looks like, and this reduced body weight of the bulls is one of the key reasons that they have an extended working life, as less stress is placed on their skeletal structure.

Cluden Newry Angus have been using yearling bulls in their operation for many years. Yearling bulls are used to back up AI programs on heifers, while some well grown yearlings are used over cows. While yearling bulls are generally single sire mated at Cluden Newry for ease of parent verification, they suggest the best way to utilise them is in a multiple mating situation with other bulls of similar age. Where possible mating loads of 25-30 heifers per bull are ideal, however breeders have successfully joined yearlings at 40:1.

Cluden Newry have selected 25 yearling bulls suitable for heifer joinings which are available for private treaty sales this spring. These bulls have been run in a separate management group to ensure they are sufficiently well grown to be joined in spring 2017. The onset of puberty and sexual maturity is directly related to the level of nutrition, with bulls on a high plane of nutrition likely to reach puberty at a younger age.

If you would like to discuss how the use of yearling bulls could work in your operation, call us on 0417 013 172.