



Question: Why should I consider semen testing my herd bull(s)?

Answer: A Breeding Soundness Exam (BSE) is one way to evaluate the effectiveness of your bull. A BSE, however, does not test for libido- which is the bull's desire to mount and breed a cow. The Society for Theriogenology maintains standards that every bull should reach before they are turned out for the breeding season. These standards, if met, give us a way to predict that the bull should be able to handle up to 30 cows by himself. The initial part of the exam involves a general health exam: body condition, eyes, feet, scrotum (shape, circumference), the secondary sex glands via rectal palpation, and the penis itself. Once the semen sample is acquired (usually by electro-ejaculation) it is examined under a microscope for motility and morphology. Motility is the percentage of sperm swimming in a forward motion (not spinning or dead). Morphology is assessed by staining a slide in order to count a 100 sperm and record the percentage of normal sperm versus deformed/dead sperm. If the bull passes all these tests he receives a Satisfactory Prognosis; if not, he either fails or is deferred for a month in order to be retested. A BSE is just one tool to help us determine how to manage our breeding herd and can also help us catch a problem before next year's calving season.