

# The EBLEX Beef Better Returns Programme

EBLEX has identified five key areas where the beef industry can improve returns. They form the basis of the themes of the Beef Better Returns Programme (Beef BRP), a series of events, literature and other materials to help producers hone their skills and make more from their herd.

The five key themes of Beef BRP are:

- ◆ **Better Systems and Costings** – by benchmarking costs against the industry average, beef producers can identify different areas where savings can be made or returns can be improved. For example, variable costs (like feed and forage, veterinary bills and bedding) per head of cattle among the bottom third of extensive finishers are nearly twice those of the top third.
- ◆ **Better Breeding** – using Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) to improve, for example, carcase merit (conformation, fat covering, carcase weight) can result in an extra £17/calf. Using EBVs to improve maternal traits (ease of calving, calf mortality) can improve returns by another £9/calf.
- ◆ **Better Health and Fertility** – a tighter calving pattern can improve returns by up to £60/calf with an increase in the average weaning weight at a fixed weaning date.
- ◆ **Better Selection** – targeting a particular market, researching its specific needs and selecting cattle at the optimum time to earn the best price can improve returns by up to 20p/kg (deadweight).
- ◆ **Better Feeding** – correct rationing and grazing management can offer a 10% saving on total feed and forage costs without performance loss. This could save up to £18/animal in an intensive finishing system, for example.

The EBLEX Beef Better Returns Programme (Beef BRP) is holding events and producing literature to help producers to make more from their beef enterprise, including top tips on looking after a bull and how to use EBVs to achieve herd objectives.

## Bull fertility – before and after purchase

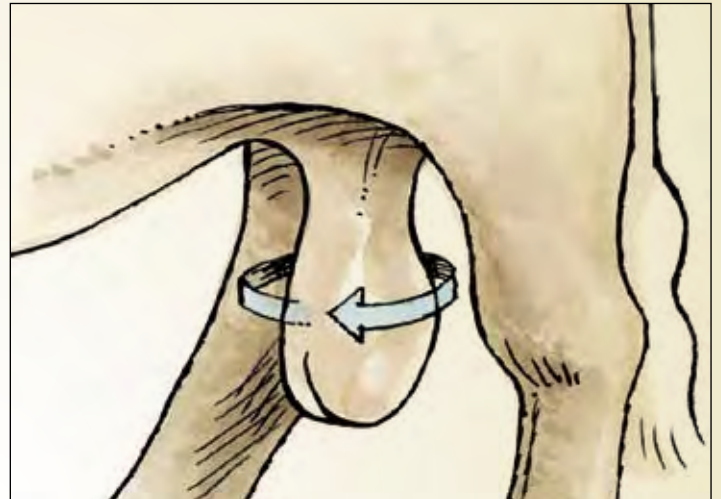
The stock bull is probably the most expensive asset in a herd. As such, beef producers should take care over the selection of a bull, checking fertility and using Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) to ensure he will meet the objectives of the herd.



“People often say that a bull is worth half the herd, but he rarely receives half the care and attention of the other stock,” says Netta de la Cour, Beef BRP Project Manager, EBLEX. “Making sure you choose a bull carefully, using EBVs, testing fertility, and looking after the bull properly once he is on the farm can make a big difference to returns.”

## Bull fertility, soundness and condition – before you buy

Ideally a breeding soundness examination should be undertaken prior to the purchase of a bull. As far as reproduction goes, size matters – but it is the size of the testicles that is important, rather than any other anatomical feature. A bull aged 15 months or more should have a scrotal circumference of at least 30cm.



Producers should also carefully assess conformation, feet, and body condition score at the sale where the bull is being purchased. Bulls at sales are often in very good body condition for a show, but can be too fat to work. This can have an effect on the bull's semen quality.

Bulls that are fit to work should have a body condition score of 3.5 with minimal surplus fat. It can take four to six weeks to lose extra show condition, so producers should allow plenty of time for the bull to adjust before he is required to work.

## Once the bull is on your farm

Isolation and accommodation are important considerations once the bull has arrived on farm. He should be isolated for 21 days before release into the herd, to make sure blood tests come back negative. Ideally the bull should be able to familiarise himself with the sights and sounds of his new home, kept in comfortable surroundings within sight of the cows.

Breeding soundness examinations should be repeated before each breeding season as a fertile bull one year may not be fertile the following year. Semen may be collected and examined both physically and microscopically for volume, density and mortality.

“Your bull can make a great contribution to your business,” concludes Netta de la Cour. “Look after him and he will look after you.”

The information in this article is taken from a leaflet produced in conjunction with the National Beef Association which is available to all who sign up to Beef BRP. Every beef producer in England can sign up simply by calling 0870 241 8829 (local rate) or emailing [brp@eblex.org.uk](mailto:brp@eblex.org.uk). The programme is free and producers are under no obligation.