



## Ensure bulls are in your plan

When the drought breaks, seasonal and split calving herds will recover faster if they have more cows due to calve early in the next calving period. Optimising bull management this mating season is a low cost way to help achieve this.

Good bull management means running adequate numbers of healthy, fertile, well-grown bulls with the herd, and reducing the stresses caused by heat, overworking or dominant animals.

In seasonal and split calving herds that have already started or are about to start mating, now is the time to review bull management.

To ensure that bulls will get as many cows pregnant as soon as possible, you need to make sure that you have enough bull power to cover all the cows that are on heat at the time. You'll need enough bulls to allow them to be rested regularly and to replace bulls that become lame, sick or injured.

Check the table below and make sure you have enough bulls running with your herd. If not, additional bulls will be a profitable investment. The benefits from increasing bull power if needed outweigh the cost of extra bulls.

### Minimum number of bulls required to run with the herd in seasonal/split calving herds

No. cows in milking herd	Likely % of herd pregnant at start of bull mating			
	Very low (less than 40%)	Low (40-50%)	Moderate (50-70%)	High (more than 70%)
100	2-4	2-3	2	2
200	5-6	4-5	3	2
300	7-8	6	4-5	3
400	9-11	7-8	5-6	3-4
500	12-13	9-10	7	4-5
600	14-15	11-12	8-9	5

Source: *The InCalf Book*, page 123

Some notes on the table above:

- If you are not sure how many are already in calf, estimate at a low percentage of 40-50%;
- Don't forget to double the ratio of bulls if you use a heat synchronising program for the short period around the time those cows are due back on heat;
- For herds over 600 cows add 1-2 extra bulls for every extra 100 cows in the herd.

It is also worth checking the body condition and physical health of bulls:

- They should be in body condition score 4.5 to 5.5;
- Don't forget to vaccinate and drench the bulls;
- Consider arranging a veterinary examination of all bulls at least a month before you wish to put them with the herd.

The **InCalf Bull Management Practices tool** takes you through a simple checklist to make sure your bulls will do the best job this season. Download a copy from InCalf's website [www.incalf.com.au](http://www.incalf.com.au), under "Herd Assessment Pack Tools" in the 'InCalf Resources and Tools' section.

If part of your plan to get through the drought is to shorten your herd's AI period this year, and put your bulls in sooner:

- Remember that it is likely that fewer cows will be pregnant at the start of bull mating, so more bulls will be needed initially.
- As mating progresses and the number of non-pregnant cows decrease, fewer bulls will then be needed. However, NEVER run less than two bulls with the herd.
- Have a system to keep track of how well the bulls are doing. It may be worth using a tail-paint system to identify the cows returning to heat and being ridden after the first three or six weeks of mating.

InCalf will provide further information and advice in future bulletins to help you preserve your herd fertility so you can recover quickly when the drought breaks.

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