



The Benefits of Using a Teaser Bull in Suckler Beef Herds

Using a teaser bull in conjunction with a chin ball or other heat detection aids can enhance breeding efficiency by minimising missed heats thus increasing the annual number of calves born per cow and allowing a more compact calving season.

In addition it can also simplify management, teaser bulls are most often used in conjunction with a chin ball harness (containing paint) in order to more easily identify cows in heat. Farmers can visually inspect the herd and quickly identify marked cows thus reducing the time taken for heat detection leading to a more profitable, labour efficient and sustainable suckler enterprise.

What is a teaser bull?

A teaser bull isn't the same as a castrate. He still has his testes and produces testosterone, so he looks and acts like a regular bull. However, the epididymis or vas deferens has been removed. This blocks the pathway for sperm produced in the testicles from being included in the ejaculate. This means that a teaser bull may mate a cow but cannot put her in calf.

Because they have the same libido as intact bulls, they can bring cows into stronger heat and help get them cycling sooner (if the cows are in good condition). This can shorten the time between calving and conception and reduce the need for synchronisation in late calvers.



Safety Tip: Teaser bulls still have all the size, libido, and aggression of a normal bull, so they should be handled carefully to avoid injury.

What is a suitable bull to use as a teaser?



Ideally a prospective young bull should be 9-12 months when chosen for procedure



Must be healthy, good size, with no apparent clinical signs of issues with feet, heart, lungs etc.



Ensure the bull will be large enough to mount the cows. Using the chin ball you will be looking for paint marks on the cows back. The bigger the size, the less likely he is to be injured



Breed: Most often Friesian or Friesian cross animals are used due to their relevant cost, but also due to their increased libido – they are more active, however you can use one of your own bulls, once they meet the other criteria.



Temperament: the animal itself should have a calm temperament, but also look at his dam's temperament if possible. Again on the dairy breeds, while they may be more active, they typically have poorer docility, particularly if kept beyond one season.



Biosecurity: If purchasing a bull they should be treated the same as any bought in animal, he can carry diseases like BVD, Johne's, IBR, leptospirosis, and tuberculosis. They should be vaccinated and dosed in line with the farm's herd health plan and isolated for a period of 3 weeks from the main herd.

When to carry out the procedure?

The procedure, which must be carried out by an experienced veterinary surgeon, should be conducted at least 9 weeks pre breeding in order to allow sufficient time for recovery, and to ensure that all fertile sperm have been removed from the reproductive system before the breeding season. It's recommended to put the teaser with the cows 2-3 weeks pre breeding. Ideally, the bull should be semen tested prior to the start of the breeding season to ensure that the procedure was successful and that there are no viable sperm in his semen.

Where is the procedure carried out?

Some vets may do an epididymectomy where they remove the epididymis other vets may perform a vasectomy where they remove the vas deferens. Both procedures will produce a teaser bull. If performing an epididymectomy this may be done standing in a crush under light sedation and local anaesthetic. If the vet is performing a vasectomy this may be done with the bull lying down under stronger anaesthesia. Usually on farm, anaesthetic is given in the crush or perhaps in a calving pen using the calving gate for restraint. The animal is then put in to a very clean, well bedded shed where they will lie down. When the animal wakes up, it's in a comfortable, clean environment. The animal can remain "drowsy" for a half day afterwards.

Where is the procedure carried out?

The procedure can only be carried out by a vet and they will usually administer a sedative to calm the bull and a local anaesthetic will be applied to the surgical area to minimise pain. Therefore it is recommended to withhold feed for 12–24 hours before the procedure to reduce risks during sedation. Water can usually be offered until a few hours prior to commencing the procedure.



The procedure

The vet will make a small incision in the scrotum to access the vas deferens or epididymis on each side. Both vas deferens/epididymis are either removed to block passage of sperm from the testes to the penis. The incision is then closed with sutures.

Put a ring in the bull's nose: this is to identify him, but also as a safety measure

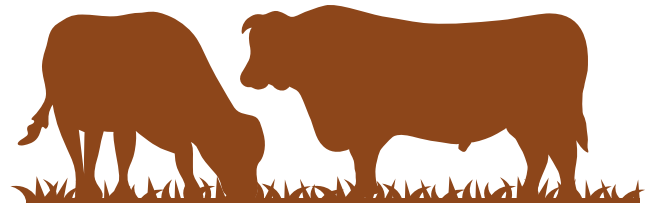
After the procedure

Monitor: Keep the bull in a clean, dry area for 24–48 hours to monitor for signs of infection or complications. Do not put the bulls with other animals for a week or so, until the stitches begin to heal.

Wound Care: Check the surgical site daily for redness, swelling, or discharge.

When can he go in with the cows?

He should be left a minimum of six weeks before going in with any females. Ideally fertility test him to ensure the procedure worked.



How many cows can one bull service?

The recommendation is no more than 50 cows per vasectomised bull, any more and the bull may get tired and not pick up some cows on heat

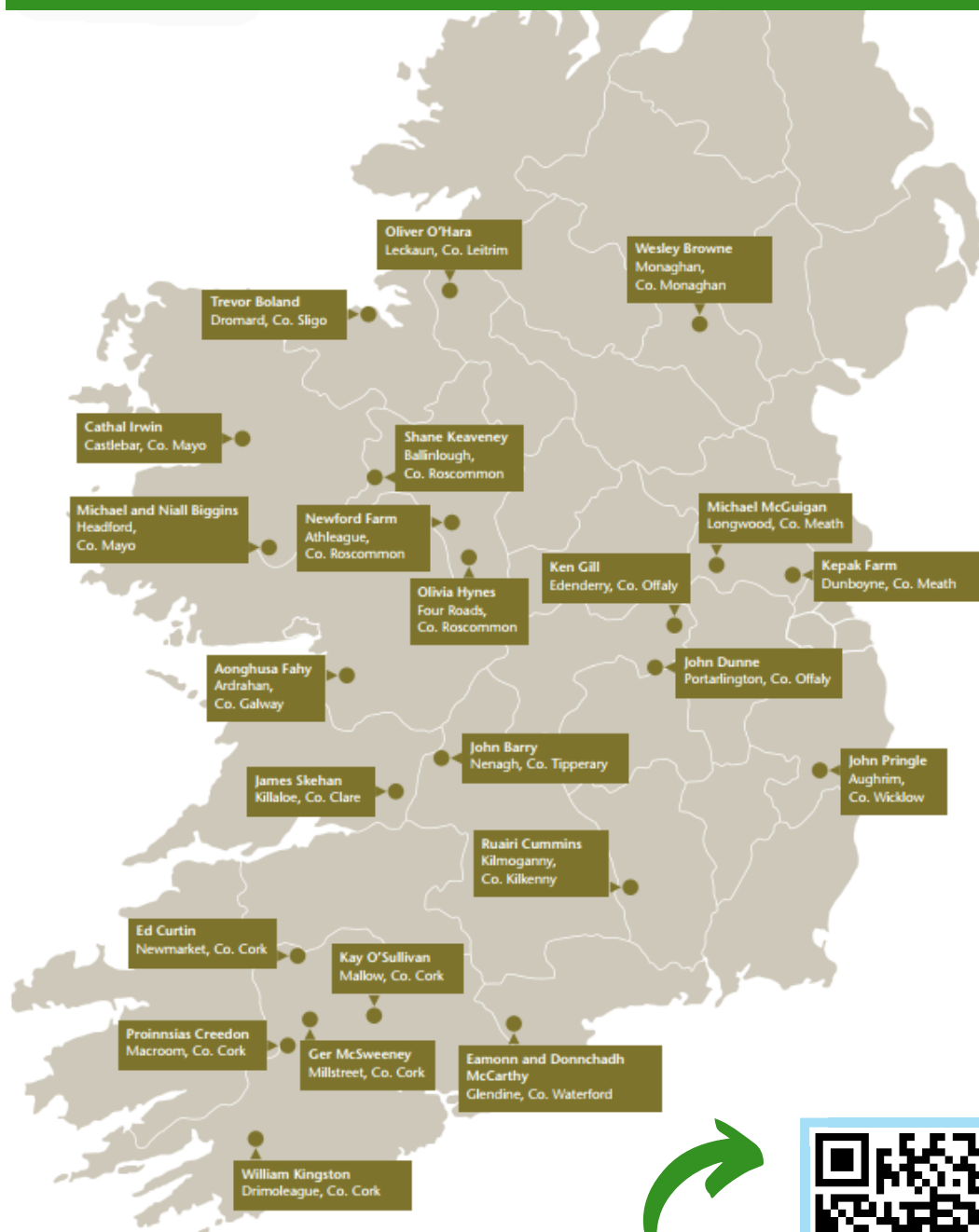
Can a teaser bull be used for more than one year?

It is usually recommended to use teaser bull for only one year and then fatten and replace him. They can become aggressive in their second year.

Overall cost?

It depends on whether you use your own animal or buy one in. The benefits are clear—if a cow misses the first service in a weanling system, the extra 21 days of weight gain could add up to €73 based on a live weight price of €3.50 per kilo.

Teagasc Future Beef Programme Farms



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