

A.I.

By: Ed Post

I had a call the other day from an interesting person asking if I had a breeding age bull for sale. After telling the person that I did not, I mentioned that I didn't use a bull. I strictly use 100% artificial insemination on my Dexters. After talking for several minutes and suggesting who to call that may have a bull for sale it was decided that they would pursue the idea of A.I. to breed their cows.

For me it was never a choice, when you start with one cow and only a plan to have a herd of less than a dozen animals I just could not justify owning a bull. Sure there are some pluses to owning a bull, I do not have to be around when I want my females bred, just let out the bull.. All the calves should be similar for the good or bad, easier to sell in a lot when time to move the crop. The timing of insemination should be right on and the cow will become pregnant after the first service is nothing else is wrong. But I still would have a hard time using a bull knowing that.

The cost of owning a herd sire is expensive. First you must purchase your new sire, but from where? Canada, USA, England, or will it be New Zealand. 50% of the calf's genetics comes from that new sire. So you better find the best that you can afford and then some. Once you have found your new sire he will require room and board every day that he is there whether or not he has done a thing.

You have looked at your cows and realize that there is no one bull that will improve the areas that need improvement. Now what? Do you need two herd sires, or more? Or do you compromise and choose bulls that will kind of help with some of the areas that need help but may cause a problem in others?

You have found the perfect or near perfect bull and you use him for two years and now his daughters are of breeding age. Time to look for a new junior herd sire. Now there are two hormone-raging sires around looking for work. At least it might help the last problem and Junior can correct Senior's faults.

So now the herd sire has bred all your females for the year, no work on your part, but you have cows calving here and there and not sure when. What do you do if someone needs help? Here at least the Dexter breed will help you because they basically need no assistance. Thank goodness for it is a long calving season if you are up in the night looking for or helping cows calve.

Calves are on the ground and all is well, but you start to notice a fault in the majority of the calves. You ask around only to find out that the perfect herd sire that you have has past generations that show the same fault. And everyone NOW tells you that this cow family is known for the fault and asks why you didn't know that, saying "Oh, we thought that you

knew about this problem.” You always find out about these things afterwards. But now you have a calf crop that may not be suitable for breeding stock because of the noticeable structure flaw.

I don't mean to be negative about owning a bull or against anyone that sells breeding bulls, but I would be so limited because of my budget. I could not afford the best the world has to offer and would have to settle for what the neighbour has to sell. And that will not do when I know that I can obtain some of the best Dexter genetics via. A.I.

I can research for sires that will compliment or improve my females on an individual basis. I can select a different male for each one of my breeding females. If I want to experiment with colour, size, or even cross breeding, it is done one cow at a time. And when I make a mistake at least it may be only one calf for my freezer, and not the whole year's worth.

Is it more work to A.I.? I'd say no. This time of the year I am looking at catalogues, or talking to the owners of the bulls that have semen available for A.I. use about the pluses and minuses of their bulls. I use the internet to search pedigrees and seek information about sire. In a matter of a few hours I have selected the mates for my cows for the New Year and it is all done from the warmth of my office. I don't have to worry about the cold and snow, frozen water, slugging hay or shoveling sh.... For that herd sire that I would only need for a couple of days a year. During the breeding season I may have a little more work to get my cows in the barn to be serviced but it is only a matter of minutes and they are tied and ready for the Artificial Insemination of my choice.