

Use an A.I. Sire as the Cleanup Bull

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A successful Artificial Insemination (AI) program requires a commitment to heat detection and a skilled technician. However, there are situations when breeding 100 percent of the cows and heifers by AI does not seem doable. Many Kentucky dairy farmers who are breeding some cows and heifers by AI also keep a cleanup bull to use in those situations and on problem breeders. The main down side of this situation is that the dangerous dairy bull is still on the farm and can inflict human injury or death without warning. A second down side is the lost opportunity for more rapid genetic improvement when cows or heifers become pregnant to the cleanup bull. A third down side is the fact that a bull is being fed and maintained to get a few cows pregnant. This makes the cost per natural service pregnancy very high.

A logical alternative to using a natural service cleanup bull is to use AI cleanup sires. AI cleanup sires should be sires that have a high relative conception rate and can be purchased at a low cost per unit of semen. Each AI organization has some of these sires available. Often AI cleanup sires can be selected that are also high in economically important production and type traits. Use of AI cleanup sires gives dairy farmers the opportunity to continue rapid genetic improvement and maximize the odds of getting cows pregnant.

Genetic improvement and reproductive efficiency are both goals of a successful breeding program. If cows which do not conceive to AI become pregnant when bred by the natural service cleanup bull, then the problem is not the cows. The heat detection program, semen handling, timing of breeding and insemination procedures should be reviewed and corrections made if more than 40 percent of the milking cows require three or more AI services.