

Natural Service is Not the Answer

By: George Heersche, Jr., Ph.D.



There are too many bulls running with Kentucky dairy herds. Many producers justify this practice by thinking the reproductive performance of their herd will be better with natural service. A study from the University of Georgia indicates the reproductive performance of natural service herds was not better than reproductive performance of herds that had found a way to make AI doable.

The following table summarizes the results of that study. The data are from DHI records of herds from four southern states that either bred predominately by AI or Natural Service (NS). The criteria was 90% or greater for AI or NS. A total of 905 herds were included in the study, 616 AI and 289 NS.

	AI	Natural Service
No. of Cows in Herd	140	162
Rolling Herd Avg - Milk	17,116	15,179
Days Open	148	150
Calving Interval	14.1	14.2
Days Dry	67	70
Percent Entering the Herd	31.6	30.5
Culling Percentage	31.4	30.6
Reprod. Culls (% all Cows)	8.8	6.4
Reprod. Culls (% Culls)	27.9	20

Unfortunately, most bull bred herds in Kentucky have not found a way to make AI doable so they have to use a bull just to get cows pregnant. Several Kentucky dairy farmers have found that using programmed breeding (Ovsynch or Heatsynch) works very well and makes AI doable. Information on programmed breeding is found in other articles.

No one will question the value and importance of getting cows pregnant. However, we need to question the logic of putting up with the danger a dairy bull presents and the diseases he can spread. We also need to question our dairy farmers when they put themselves in the position where they are not taking advantage of the superior milk producing ability of daughters of genetically superior AI sires. Please AI dairy cows and heifers!