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## Season 1, Episode 9

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**Olivia Amundson:** Welcome to another episode of cattle HQ brought to you by South Dakota State University Extension. I am Olivia Amundson cow calf field specialist based out of the Sioux Falls regional office. On today's episode, we're going to be talking about winter bull management with Andrew Snyder and Julie Walker. Andrew, why don't you give us a quick introduction?

**Andrew Snyder:** Hi, thanks for having me. I am Andrew Snyder. I am fourth generation rancher. We ranch just between Sturgis and Rapid City, full time, on the ranch is my dad, my brother, Daniel and myself. And then the rest of our family helps on on the heavier days when we have a lot of cattle work to do.

**Olivia Amundson:** Thank you. And we also have Julie Walker. Julie, would you give us a quicker introduction as well?

**Dr. Julie Walker:** Sure. So I'm Dr. Julie Walker, and I'm the extension Beef specialist. And I work in Brookings, and so I work with cow calf and side of the production.

**Olivia Amundson:** Thanks, Julie. I also have my co-worker here. Kiernan Brandt Kiernan, why don't you just give your traditional hello.

**Kiernan Brandt:** Yeah, technical technical expertise today, behind the mic. But yeah, Kiernan Brandt, other cow calf field specialist based out of the Watertown office.

**Olivia Amundson:** All right, we're happy to have you guys all here today. So like I said, we're going to be talking about winter ball management. And so let's just, I guess, jump right into the conversation. And Andrew, I'm probably gonna pick on you first. Tell us a little bit about your operation and how you manage your bulls.

**Andrew Snyder:** Sure, well, typically, we are a little bit non-traditional, where we background, our own calves will retain ownership of our steers and feed them out and sell them directly to the packer. We also will grow our own replacement heifers and market them typically locally to neighbors and others who need some replacement heifers. So we're trying to and then that way, we can also return those genetics back into our herd. On our on the feeding side, we pretty much feed out anything that we can open heifers, steers, we'll do some grass steers. And we can trace those through and get good data back from the packer. And so we can follow very accurately through what our genetics are doing to our cow herd. And, and, and the bulls come in. Obviously huge in that. And being able to, and taking care of your bowls is extremely important in this whole in the whole circle that the ranching cycle goes through every year.

**Olivia Amundson:** Yeah, and I think you it sounds like you guys have a lot going on. And genetics plays a huge role in a lot of that. So how do you? Or what do you genetically set select your bulls for?

**Andrew Snyder:** Well, obviously, the mother cow is huge, and having a cow that can withstand the environment that we put them through. And what I mean when I say that is that a lot of our cows end up grazing in the Black Hills National Forest. This was actually our 75th year grazing in the Runkel grazing allotment of the Black Hills National Forest. So those cows are, we expect a lot from them. And we expect them to move we expect them to graze efficiently and obviously raise a calf rebreed at the same time. So they do get put through the put through their paces on what we expect them to do. For example, in the permit that's right behind our house, it's approximately three and a half miles wide, and about seven miles long and it's about a six and a half mile journey for those calves to get there. So it's a very rigorous journey. And obviously having a cow that can make that and having sound feet and legs and being able to move themselves throughout the forest all summer is a major thing for us and especially on the bull side also.

**Olivia Amundson:** Yeah, so it sounds like feet and legs is definitely that's something that is important. And being in South Dakota, obviously we go through different season changes. And so we discuss how we're going to talk about winter bull management.

**Andrew Snyder:** Sure.

**Olivia Amundson:** I guess in those terms, you know, once you pull the bulls off at the end of the breeding season, kind of walk us through how you manage those bowls.

**Andrew Snyder:** So our bulls will win when they when we pull them which is a again going to the because the forest scenario we breed early. So these bulls are getting pulled about the first week, second week in July. So they spend the rest of the summer on grass and then we try and graze them absolutely as long as we can and then they're still out grazing right now and we're starting to roll them a few licked barrels as their as their manure paddies change and just kind of watch them and try and Just watch their body condition. And this isn't, these are not my words have gotten somebody else. But you know, bulls are one of those things that sometimes a producer forgets about him for the, for part of the winter, and you know, we're doing all sorts of things and we don't do any row crop. But you know, guys are harvesting their human doing moving grain, they're doing all their the fall things and for us, you know, it's shots and it's and it's weaning and getting the calves healthy, and then getting into the feedlot, and you know, so on and so forth. And all of a sudden, you know, rolls around, then you're calving, and then you really forget about them. And so, you know, granted, they're getting fed everyday during the winter once they're out of pasture. But bulls can be something that you inadvertently in and accidentally forget about a little bit on the on their body condition score side. And so I think it's very important to keep a good forage supply and for those bulls. And there's, you know, you can pick your host of what you would like to do, whether it's lick tubs, or cake or distillers, whatever, a lot of times, what we do is we'll feed them hay, and then they'll get a, they'll get a good lick barrel, and, right, wrong or indifferent. That's what we tend to do, and get them ready. And it's, it's amazing once you get into the springtime, and you get a you get that pop of green grass, how much you know, they really do shine up and they look really nice in springtime.

**Kiernan Brandt:** And kind of like we chatted about earlier. Some guys, especially when chores start to pile up habit have a habit of letting those bolts kind of slip by and then all of a sudden, it's six weeks out from the time you need them or the time you at least need them BSE. And yeah, if you've neglected them, you can be quite aways up a creek at that point. So, you know, I'm actually going to digress a little bit and put Dr. Walker on the spot here. And maybe have her talk a little bit through just the technical side of assessing protein and assessing adequate nutrition through manure as we go through some of this some of these seasons.

**Dr. Julie Walker:** Okay, um, so the reality is, bulls are often neglected animals on their operation. But the reality of that is, we can allow that to happen just due to the fact that they I don't want to say they work a short season, but typically it's about 90 days, 60 to 90 days. And so that is a relatively short season when we look at the whole year. So when we look at nutrition, we seriously have to think about are those still growing bull, so are they like this is they were your lane bowl, and now they're coming into their first winter. So they're 18 months, they're still growing. So their nutritional needs are going to be much higher than that three or four year old bull out there that might you might have that isn't growing any longer. And so when we evaluate those nutritional needs, we just need to really look at what those nutritional needs are. Because the protein requirements for that younger bull will be higher than that of the older bull. And so we need to look that so Kiernan, you suggested looking at the mirror, I really can't tell anything by the mirror. I know there's a lot of wives tales that. And yes, there's some truth to this. If they're higher in protein, typically, there'll be a looser paddy versus a harder one. But that typically has to do a fiber more than protein. And so let's not measure manure, but if we really hay test or do feed analysis, run it through our program, we can have a really good measure of exactly what we're putting in front of those. And as Andrew said, you know, they have their bulls out on pasture. And if we pull those bulls away from the cows, and put them in a pasture, so they're not bothered by the potential of a cow and heat, because if they're across the road, or across the fence from the cows, um, they're still interested. And so we need to kind of stick them in a corner per se, where there's no cows around. And they'll graze, they'll add that condition they need. Ideally, we'd like them coming out of into spring into the breeding season about a body condition score six. And so when we think about that, you certainly want to evaluate your bulls probably 90 days earlier, 120 days earlier, to make sure they're in the body condition and that will tell you a lot where you're at. The other thing is how you manage those bulls beyond nutrition is do you group them all together? And if you do, are you prepared to have a big enough pen so the underdog has the place to go hide from the King dog or the head bulll in this because there's gonna be a pecking order within those bulls and so to eliminate injuries in those wintertime because when you get to the BSE’s you may not have the performance you want, they won't pass their fertility test. And then you have a lot of money invested in a bull, and you're not able to get the offspring you want from that. So I think they're really key things when we think about winter management is that feed, as well as making sure we have a pen for them. And also, Andrew said, you know, they're out on pasture, that physical activity is critical for those bulls, you put them in a small pan, they get kind of fat, they get over condition, they're not ready to do the marathon, following the cows around the pasture, that kind of stuff in the spring. And so I think that becomes critical.

**Kiernan Brandt**: Well, that's something we have to be really aware of in terms of transitioning them and their level of exercise, because their nutritional requirements will change along with that level of activity. Right? Same as a, an active runner versus a couch potato.

**Dr. Julie Walker:** Yeah. And so you, you totally got that. If you're running marathons, you better eat a little bit more than an eight to five worker come home, sit on the couch for the next six hours or eight hours are their nutritional needs, those bowls are the same way. And that's why we want them in a body condition score six. So maybe if they're not, how do I put this politically correct. So let's say the bulls have one job is to service those cows. And so they're going to get interested in those cows, they're going to blow off eating. So we need to have some condition on those cows so that they can lose some. And we don't have them in a negative energy condition that could impact the sperm quality.

**Olivia Amundson:** Well, even being in an over conditioned state of quality can affect sperm quality as well, because the fat deposition within the scrotum is going to have effects too.

**Dr. Julie Walker:** Yeah, that is 100%. Correct. So that's why we don't want, yes, we say a body condition six. And everyone's six seems to be slightly different. But we certainly don't want them to start getting pudgy looking, or that finish steer ready to go to market? And so you don't want it in that status.

**Olivia Amundson:** Yeah, absolutely. So nutrition is huge. Um, Julie, you brought up another really good point on BSE’s body, not body, breeding, soundness, soundness exam, sorry, talking body condition scores. Here I am. And actually, my question is directed towards Andrew, Andrew. Um, do you guys do BSE’s? On your bulls?

**Andrew Snyder:** Absolutely. That's another thing that I think sometimes gets overlooked. And a lot of times when there is a fertility issue within a group of cows or a particular pasture is blamed on the cows, you know, they they did, the cows did this, they did that, you know, something was wrong, something, whatever, whatever. But, you know, maybe it was a bull issue. And maybe you need to look at that also. And did you test them? Did you not test them? You know, was there? Did he get hurt afterwards? You know, there's, there's a multitude of different things that happen. Bulls are incredibly frustrating. They're, they're nobody's favorite. And they just continuously cause problems. And so there's always there's always something on the bull side, you know, talking about exercise. So we have a very unique bull pasture, and it's in between the I-90 interstate and the railroad, and it's a long skinny pasture. They're, they're shoved in there. And it's, they have, I don't know, it's pretty, it's not huge, but they got 100 acres or so that they can get around in and we feed them in there and we unrolled bales, so I feel that the injury issue isn't quite as much because when you unroll that bale, you're going several 100 feet, and you can move that feed around and each one of them, they line up, like they're at a feed bunk but there's 25 feet between each one of them because that's what they do. And so I think that that probably aids in impossibly less injury issues during the feeding process. They also have to move quite aways to water, they ended up they end up getting a fair bit of exercise throughout the winter. So that's probably very helpful. Also…

**Kiernan Brandt:** You mentioned some national forest leases are those mixed pastures with other lease lessees?

**Andrew Snyder:** There is one, one permit that we have that is so yes, they are mixed. They're mixed with and so you know, we turn on X number of bulls, the others turnout X number of bulls and that's very non typical within Black Hills National Forest to be that way. Most of them are you one owner for each allotment.

**Kiernan Brandt:** Interesting. I I'm curious and the reason I ask that's very common. Not sure this has come out on the podcast, but I'm Wyoming transplant. And that's pretty common down on some of those bigger BLM grazing allotments. Just curious of your general philosophy regarding herd health in a situation like that where you don't have control over maybe some of the other bulls coming in?

**Andrew Snyder:** Right. Well, generally, I would say that when we turn out, you know, the second week in June or so most of our cows have been pretty well exposed. You know, obviously, there's gonna be a few lagging. The other thing is that, cows, it's amazing when you have a commingled permit, they really tend to spend the first part of their summer in the group that you brought him up there with, they just they don't tend to mix near as much. And I don't know why. But that's kind of what they do. And so I would say that as a whole, it's not a huge issue, because of when we have when we turn bowls out, and that's unique to us, I guess.

**Olivia Amundson**: And Andrew, so kind of going back on the breeding soundness exams, and maybe for some of our listeners who aren't extremely familiar with those, when would you BSE or bulls prior to the breeding season?

**Andrew Snyder:**

Sure, well, there's a couple trains of thought on that. The first is that you bring them over and you test them the day you rated turnout, because then it's only busting up your crowd once. But that's probably not the Julie's shaking head. So that's probably not the best, but typically will be several weeks out. And that way, it gives you a chance to purchase additional bulls, if you need to get rid of the ones that are that aren't good. And it gives you the ability that when you bring them back to turn them out with the cows, you can retest the ones that didn't pass, and a lot of times, or else, you know, the veterinary will say, Well, you know, let him Let him get out, let him service a few more cows, and we'll pull him in. So a lot will pull him in retesting. So we'll keep that one close by and try and, and retest him if that's the case. Yeah.

**Olivia Amundson**: So Andrew brought up a really good point about, you know, going a little bit farther out prior to the breeding season before those bulls are actually going out with those cows so that they could retest. And I think that's an important point because bulls go through something known as spermatogenesis. And it's about a 61 day cycle. And so what that means is, if one of these bulls maybe does have a negative test that comes back, that bull Go, go through spermatogenesis, and we can retest that bowl, and he may have adequate sperm at that time. So it is important that if we are thinking about BSE’s, that, that we do push it out far enough, so that if we do have some of those bowls that didn't meet their requirements, that we can retest them, so we're not necessarily culling a potentially good bowl or having to think about buying another bowl. So that's a really good point, Andrew, the other thing I was thinking about, again, you know, in our multiple climate state that we have thinking about colder weather, and maybe injury to those scrotums. Do you see a lot of that? Or what are some of the things that you do to reduce some of that injury?

**Andrew Snyder:** We just don't see a whole lot of that every few years, it seems like will say, you know, this one's got a little scab on the bottom, scrotum or something like that. But and I can't say exactly why. But we just we personally don't deal with a whole lot of that. Partly is probably because of the pasture there's in, there's lots of cover, they have the trees to get into when it's when it's nasty and cold. And so that's probably a lot.

**Olivia Amundson:** Right. And so, I'm going to turn this question then back to Julie. So Julie, you work largely on the east side of the state. And we know that there's large differences when it comes to ball management, calm management in general, do we see these sorts of situations on the east side of the state.

**Julie Walker:** You mean like scrotal. So I'm one of the biggest things with what we see on the eastern part of state and we will see it on the western part of the state to particularly only if it gets an extremely cold winter, that becomes a huge issue with frostbite in so and the other thing is if they have to lay in wet, wet, the scrotum is right there. That's the first thing to hit the ground kind of scenario. I don't know if that's the correct way to put that. But so as that scrotums on the ground, it potentially if it's wet, cold, those things, higher risk of frostbite. And so I'm just gonna, I've seen the Snyder pasture, you know, there's no really wet spots in it, you know? And so I think that's where they're not seeing those issues. And so they're blessed within that. Typically Rapid City has usually milder conditions than Eastern River, East River. And so those has happened issues. So a lot of the East River guys will ensure that there's padding on there, they've got dry bedding, those kind of things to avoid those issues because frost damage those kinds of scrotum damaged, you can have a really good bull and just be really disappointed because they need that time to heal, recover those kinds of things, and you may miss a breeding season with them.

**Olivia Amundson:** Absolutely. It's just crazy how there's such large differences from one side of the state to the other side of the state.

**Dr. Julie Walker:** Yeah, but I think the principles are the same. You know, because if we were dry on the eastern part of the steak, those kind of things, because I really think a lot of it has to do with the moisture. Because typically what we see is, is when they get in a muddy situation, or smaller pens, or those things, we're all here those issues or, you know, super negative conditions that we can't control. But other than that, it's usually management things where, and I think it has to do to if they're in a small pen, versus out on pasture. And so because a lot of guys will, like have their cows on pasture. So they might have them in a smaller pen, or those kinds of things where they'll have a wet spot or low spot or something. And then they just run into those kind of scenarios.

**Olivia Amundson:** Yeah, so really just going back to, to managing those bulls maybe in their own group, but making sure they have enough room to, yeah, so walk around in and navigate.

**Dr. Julie Walker:** Yeah, and the other thing too, is I think about a lot of guys need. Okay, the Snyder's probably have all those running together. But I typically would say, having those younger bulls run together versus the big bulls running together the big the old boys, just due to the fact that the nutritional requirements of those young bulls are higher. And those big older bulls don't need that. So all they're gonna do is get fat. And so we don't want that. And so I think it's kind of critically that when we think about that, if we can have two different areas that will help alleviate some of the issues with those younger bowls or not having enough nutrients, because those older bowls will get their pick first, typically, and they don't need those extra calories. And those young bulls do and so who's getting what, so by splitting them off, then the other thing is, you know, going into winter, if you have been bowls, it's easier to do it early versus when it gets colder.

**Olivia Amundson:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Kiernan Brandt:** That brings up a really good point. Actually, I wasn't, I wasn't sure I was gonna get a chance to talk about it. But that was one of the reasons I was really excited to hear that we were having having you on today. And going to be the area that we were covering is just some of the research that we're seeing now, my former mentor down in Tennessee is seeing some really exaggerated differences based on kind of that line of that line of thought is if bulls come up skinny, and we forget about him until that six weeks right before the breeding season, and try and put some condition back on. And we may have the feed resources to do that we're gonna pay for it for sure. But they're looking at a super specific immunological kind of cytokine response to that nutritional stress and the additional strain that those nutrients are causing, just because they're not acclimated to that diet, and that they're going through such a such a rapid transition in bodyweight. And they're noticing some exaggerated differences. So a lot of these things really do make sense from that, that that perspective is when we're stressing the body, putting it through these dramatic changes and not allowing, not allowing that steady state and that maintenance or just a slightly positive plane in nutrition, we can really kind of throw the throw the body into shock, throw the scrotum into shock and have some stuff get out of whack. And it's really easy to see how, like Olivia said, like you've said throughout this, you can have a bull, a bull that might even tested good before something can something can change that may have just been a simple, I forgot. And it can go haywire, very fast.

**Olivia Amundson:** But I also think that brings up a good point that it might not even be something that's related to the weather or even, well, maybe it could be related to sickness or disease, but really thinking about the inflammatory system and the cytokines and how it's actually affecting spermatogenesis. So

**Kiernan Brandt:** Well, Andrew, thanks a bunch for being here with us today. We sure do appreciate it. If you ever have any desire to come back and do another one, send us a topic and we'll definitely make it happen.

**Andrew Snyder:** Sure. Well, thank you for asking me and very good.

**Olivia Amundson:** And we thank Julie for being here as well. She skedaddled on us, but that's all right. So thank you guys for tuning in to another episode of cattle HQ and we'll see you next time.

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