

President's Letter
Al Squire
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Many dairy farmers in the northeastern Ohio area where I grew up had a “herd sire” that was kept for at least two years to sire the next crop of dairy cows. Often the “patriarch” of the herd even got the chance to strut his stuff at the local county fair where he was tied in the place of honor at the end of the show string in the dairy barn. I can remember once when I was a teenager showing cows at the county fair when one of the neighbor’s huge bulls was standing quietly as an unaccompanied young child was petting the “nice bull’s” nose. It still scares me today as I recall the instantaneous horror and panic felt by all the local dairy farmers as they quietly and quickly got that child to safety without scaring the one ton animal standing over him.

Unfortunately, my Dad as well as many of our dairy neighbors, at some point had gotten too relaxed and comfortable around their farm bulls and had found themselves in a life threatening situation in the blink of an eye. My dad was hit by our bull and he managed to roll himself under the manure spreader for protection. He sustained only minor bruises. Three other neighbors had all gotten hit by their bulls at various times and had varying degrees of physical injuries. Unfortunately, the father of a good friend was killed by the horns of his dairy bull. The huge animal had suddenly become playful at the exact moment my friend’s father had dropped his guard.

One Sunday afternoon as my family was having dinner at home, we heard the loud bellowing of our herd bull standing out in the yard under the tree between the house and the dairy barn. He had escaped his pen in the barn and put up quite a struggle as we coaxed him back into the barn while trying to prevent him from getting out on the state highway just a few yards away. That bull left for town the next day and my Dad went to AI school! That was in 1965.

As a young dairy vet in Chino, California, in the mid 1970s, I often encountered clients with bulls that were “no problem.” Interestingly the client was always in the feed alley with his clipboard, and I was the one in the pen with the bulls who were protecting their herd from the “intruder” (me). After I requested that the dairyman stand next to me in the pen while we worked, the next month the bulls were removed from the pen when I showed up for vet check.

At Southwind Dairy, after we had trouble with bulls chasing pushers, we took a long hard look at the cost/benefit ratio of bull breeding, and we decided to go 100% AI. Like many other dairymen who have made the same decision, we have had no regrets and we have one less safety issue to worry about.

The recent news of one of our local dairy vets getting injured while trying to escape a bull when she was preg-checking heifers makes me think that we could all do a better job of promoting safety around our animals, especially when we are talking about bulls. The short term benefit and convenience of having bulls check heats for us and do the breeding must certainly be weighed against the lack of genetic progress in their daughters as well as the liability risks of having these dangerous animals on the premises. As so many of us have seen, a young breeding age bull may be perfectly docile one moment and may change to a snorting monster the next. We never know the timing of this event, but we can almost predict that it will happen at some point if you keep any one bull around long enough. That is what is so frightening about it.

I would like to thank the NMSU College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences for their recognition of Beverly Idsinga for this year’s NM Outstanding Agricultural Leader Award. I would also like to thank Charlie DeGroot for his inspirational message about how fortunate DPNM is to have both Beverly and Kaye looking out for us. Thank you, ladies, for a job well done.