

# IMPACT

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Extension

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## Fort Hall Bull Grading Program improves cattle quality

### The Situation

Over 3,800 head of individually owned cattle run on one range unit on the Fort Hall Reservation. All cattle run in common so it is necessary to closely monitor bull quality to maintain and improve the quality of beef produced by Tribal cattlemen. Bull quality, including genetics and physical characteristics, plays a major role in a rancher's calf crop percentage and how well calves will perform from birth to harvest. Bottom line, bull quality affects a rancher's annual income substantially. In addition, animal disease must be monitored very closely to reduce the incidence of early abortions and death loss. If beef quality and animal diseases aren't monitored, cattlemen will experience large economic losses due to poor cattle quality, subsequent decreased marketability, low percentages of weaned calves, and disease outbreaks. Disease outbreaks cause death, and decreases in animal condition and calf crop percentages. Combined, all of these factors have the potential to decrease the sustainability of ranchers.

### Our Response

Fort Hall Extension educator, Danielle Gunn, collaborates annually with producers and tribal departments to monitor bull quality, testing of bulls for the sexually transmitted disease, trichomoniasis (causes early abortions), and fertility. This program is designed to improve cattle quality. The Bull Grading Program consists of a committee appointed to grade bulls on physical characteristics including structure and correctness, overall health, condition, soundness, and expected progeny differences (EPD's). Bull Grading Committee members are educated annually on how to grade bulls based on soundness, desired physical characteristics, and desired EPD's. Our committee of bull graders enforces a rule that all breeding age



The Fort Hall Bull Grading Committee evaluates a pen of Black Angus bulls for a Tribal rancher.

males are tested for trichomoniasis and fertility before being allowed on range. Bulls are only allowed to run for three years so the committee monitors and enforces this rule as well. Each individual bull is assigned a letter grade of A, A-, B+, B, or B-. Animals receiving a B- grade are rejected. Any rejected animal is not allowed to run on the range. Danielle works with Bull Grading Committee chair to ensure all testing and vaccination requirements are current for the breeding/grazing season. Veterinary health papers and testing forms are turned in at the time of grading to ensure the required procedures are followed. If procedures are not followed, the cattle owner cannot turn his/her cattle on range until the criteria are met. This program ensures only healthy, well-bred animals are turned on the range.

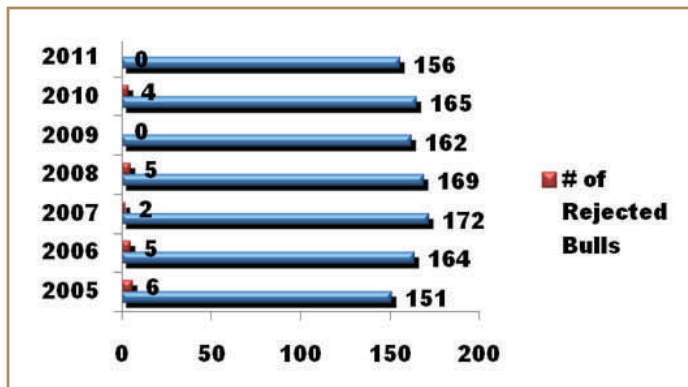
### Program Outcomes

Since program inception, bull quality has improved dramatically. For example, 4% of graded bulls were

rejected in 2005. Through this evaluation program, a steady decrease in rejected bulls occurred. In 2009, not one bull was rejected. In 2010, 2.4% were rejected, which still indicated a positive impact from the program. In 2011, no bulls were rejected, demonstrating the effectiveness of the program.

Four main outcomes have resulted from this program:

- Bull quality has improved substantially leading to improved calf crops at weaning.
- Cattle owners have learned what optimum characteristics to look for in bulls and now purchase better bulls.
- Fewer bulls are rejected which saves cattle owners several thousand dollars if they don't have to purchase additional bulls.
- Bulls are handled in conjunction with beef quality assurance guidelines to assure they are in optimum condition for bull grading and breeding seasons.



2005-2011 Bull Grading Results

### The Future

UI Extension and the Fort Hall Bull Grading Committee will continue the program. Recent rules have been passed by the committee that provide guidelines for birth, weaning and yearling EPD's to help producers decrease the incidence of dystocia (difficult births), and calf losses during calving. All newly purchased bulls for 2012 must meet the selected EPD criteria for bull birth weights to run on Reservation rangeland. We plan to implement further EPD technology in the future.

### Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Unit III Stockmen's Association
- Fort Hall Land Use Policy Commission
- Fort Hall Range Department

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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