



Farm & RANCH

A GUIDE TO AGRICULTURE NEWS AND TRENDS

Better Ranch Management

If you own and operate a ranch, you know the profit margins can be as razor thin as the fog rolling over your meadow on a cool fall day. Weather, disease or equipment malfunctions can be a major factor in determining whether or not your operation is ultimately profitable.

As an owner, there are many steps you should be taking to ensure success — no matter if you've been in the business for 30 years or are starting up your first farming operation. Read on for ideas on how to launch and sustain a fruitful farm or ranch.

GET STRATEGIC

Just like in corporate business, putting together a strategic plan is critical to your success. In fact, a business plan will be a necessity if you're looking for funding from a bank to pay for new equipment or infrastructure.

Some of the most important parts of a business plan include determining your goals, how many employees you'll need, how you'll be structured as a business and where your funding will be allocated.



Once you have these pillars in place, you'll be able to move forward with hiring employees and purchasing materials for your operation.

HIRE GOOD PEOPLE

Whether you're dealing with corporate clientele or a

herd of cattle, the most important part of any operation is the people who run it. Without great employees, you'll find yourself dealing with quality control issues that can take you away from the leadership tasks that need your focus.

How do you hire good workers? Start by looking to those immediately around you. Family members and friends are often the first hires of a ranching operation. Neighbors also can be helpful additions to your farm or ranch if they're looking for

work.

Sure, working together might complicate things in your relationship. But if you keep a healthy balance between work and socializing, you're likely to find that those closest to you will be heavily invested in your success.

Keeping Healthy Chickens

Chickens are an integral addition to any farm, adding fresh eggs to your refrigerator or those of your customers. If you're considering investing in a chicken operations, there are some things to keep in mind to make sure your money is well spent.

A major consideration is the diet you should feed to ensure your chickens are healthy.

Chickens need a balanced feed ration, as well as calcium, fresh fruits, grains and vegetables. How much feed and how often you feed your chickens can vary by age, so check with farming experts at your local agricultural co-op or even farmer's market for advice.

WHERE TO FIND CHICKENS

Chicken breeding is big business in some parts of the country, so check in with your local breeder for pricing and available options.

Alternatively, you also can find chicks at your local farm and feed stores, or check your local newspaper's classified ads.

Did you know that chickens can end up in your local animal shelter? You also may be able to find chickens at a res-



cue or sanctuary that adopts hens from factory farms for use on family ranches or even backyard coops.

HOW TO CARE FOR CHICKENS

Like any farm animal in which you can invest, proper care and adequate housing are vital. Regular daily attention,

feed and clean water are essential to raising healthy animals.

The right shelter will help keep your chickens from extreme temperatures. This is especially important for hens and roosters with large single combs because they can be prone to frostbite in colder temperatures. Proper insula-

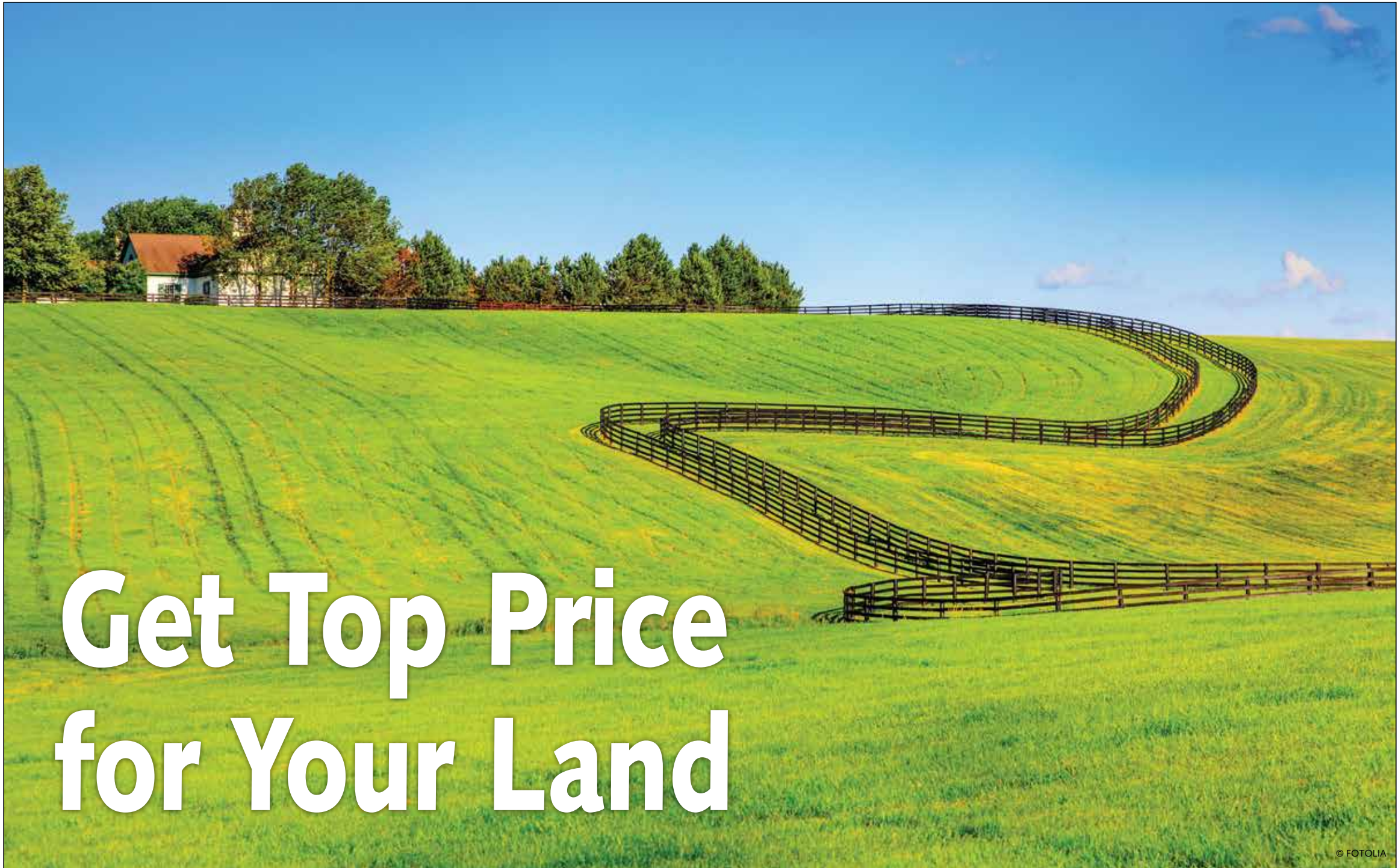
tion and straw bedding will help keep your chickens warmer during the cold months.

PREDATOR PROTECTION

Chickens are vulnerable prey to a large range of predators. From an animal as shifty as a fox to one as domesticated as your dog, your chickens

need protection from all potential predators.

This means complete enclosure in a safe hen house with four solid walls and a sturdy roof. Plan extra ground reinforcements around your coop and fence, as opossums and dogs can easily dig under faulty framing to attack your chickens.



© FOTOLIA

Get Top Price for Your Land

Looking to sell your farm? Once you get over the emotions of letting go of a piece of property that may have long-term family history attached, it's time to do your homework.

Just like in the residential real estate market, there are certain seasons that can lead to faster sales because buyers are motivated and looking toward their immediate future.

Whether you decide to sell your land independently or through a real estate agent, there are a few tips to keep in mind that will help ensure a smooth, profitable experience.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

The first step to putting your land on the market is knowing what you paid for the property

or what it was worth when you acquired it from a family member. Knowing this information allows you to compare it to today's value, which will help you decide if your investment was worthwhile.

If you're not going to make a high-profit sale, are you still interested in unloading the property? There may be determining factors, such as whether you're ready to retire or if the land has become too much to handle in its entirety.

Work with your Realtor to complete a market value assess-

ment by analyzing the value of the land around you. Gathering this type of information will help you make an educated decision.

HIRE LEGAL AND FINANCIAL HELP

Hopefully you own your property outright and can make all final decisions about the sale, but some cases can get a bit complicated. Let's say your parents are the legal owners but you all have decided that you'll be keeping the profit. You could use the help of a local attorney

to update the information on the deed filed at the courthouse.

You also should consider hiring a local certified public accountant to help you understand the tax implications of the sale. There are ways to avoid capital gains taxes when you sell your property. Your accountant will be able to walk you through the steps of making a financially wise choice.

Both local attorneys and accountants will understand the legalities associated with land sales specific to your state and region.

Finding the Right Bull

Choosing the right bull for your cattle operation isn't easy. There are many factors to consider to make sure you're adding a quality specimen to the mix. What is the breed's compatibility with your cow herd? How old is the bull? What is the bull's pedigree?

The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation in Oklahoma assists farmers and ranchers in achieving agricultural productivity. The group recommends you critique many different factors before making your purchase, whether it's from a production sale or a performance test sale.

Just like with other purchases for your farm or ranch, the more research you can put in on the front end, the more likely it is you will end up with a great investment.

AGE & PEDIGREE

How old should your bull be at the time of purchase? This is an age-old question that has no definitive answer. The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation points out that purchasing yearling bulls seems to offer some initial economic advantage because of a lower initial cost.

The foundation also reports that 2-year-old bulls can be more expensive but are usually able to service more cows and require less supplemental feed. Consider these important trade-offs when making your decision.

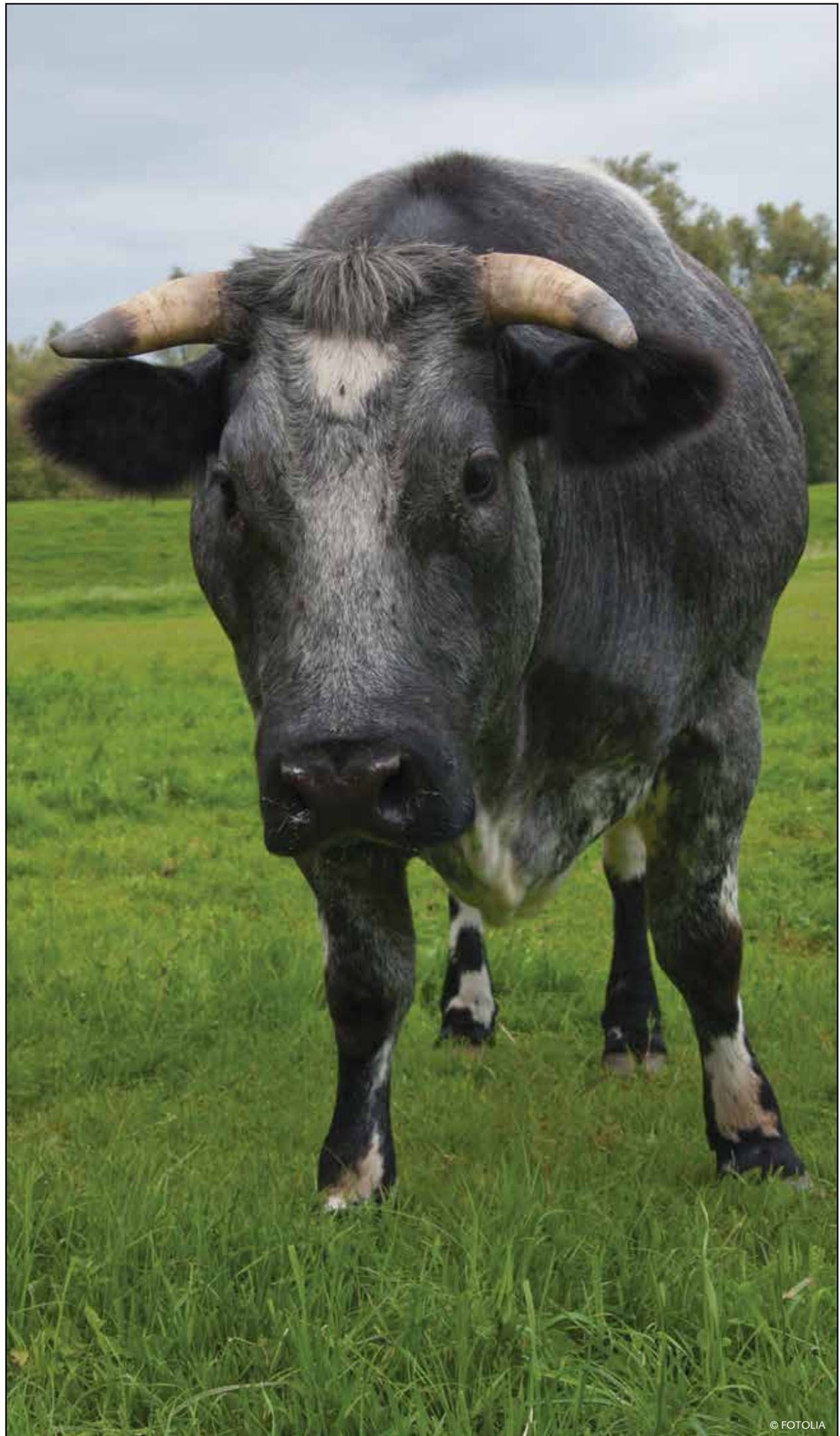
Pedigree comes into play when you're investing in the future of your cattle operation. The more attention you pay to pedigree, the more confident you can be in your bull producing predictable offspring. A reputable breeder or association will be able to provide you with the information you're looking for when it comes to your bull's pedigree.

PERFORMANCE

There are many ways to test a bull's performance against others his age and size. Some of these tests include feeding large numbers of similar-age bulls at a single location and then making comparisons between test stations.

A few metrics that testers are looking for include average daily gain and weight per day of age. These factors will help you understand a bull's potential for both short- and long-term growth.

The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation urges buyers to compare ratios or indices only between bulls from a specific test, as comparisons will not be valid if they are made between tests starting at different times or between different test stations.



Stay Safe on the Farm

Farming is no desk job. If you strap on boots and coveralls every day as your uniform, you know that with your work come inherent risks that can lead to short- or long-term injuries. An ounce of prevention, however, can keep you safe and sound on the job.

Nonfatal injuries happen to about one-third of all farm workers every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From the owner to the newest ranch hand, everyone working on a farm should be aware of potential dangers related to equipment, animals and the weather.

Without the right amount of prevention, you can put yourself and others at great risk. Follow our tips below to make sure your ranch stays on the right side of safety.

EDUCATE YOUR EMPLOYEES

What your employees don't know can actually hurt them. Especially if you hire seasonal helpers who may not necessarily have a strong background in farming and ranching, you need to take extra steps to



make sure your workers understand their jobs and the dangers that come with them.

This isn't just a recommendation, it's your responsibility, especially during the most accident-prone months of early summer. If you're located some distance away from the nearest hospital or emergency medical services station, it's more important than ever to take extra precautions as you go through the planting and harvesting season.

Along with the health and safety of your employees, you also should be concerned about the costs that can come with farm injuries. According to the National Agricultural Safety Database, about 19 percent of the farm population loses work time each year due to being involved in farm accidents. The costs associated with this amount of missed time can include medical costs, insurance premiums and lost wages.

FIRE PREVENTION

You've seen the news about wildfires forcing farmers to evacuate their land to protect themselves and their families. There are many ways to make sure your ranch doesn't pose a risk of starting a major fire.

Here are a few tips from insurer Nationwide to make sure your farm is fire-safe:

- Make sure the exhaust systems on your heavy machinery are free of leaks and in good working order;

- Avoid parking hot machinery on or near dry grass or other dry vegetation;

- Follow maintenance schedules and regularly clean chaff, dust and other combustible materials off your equipment;

- Keep fully charged fire extinguishers on tractors and combines; and

- Use welders, grinders and cutting torches in clean areas and at least 35 feet away from any flammable or combustible materials.

By the Numbers

Farming is and will continue to be big business as long as we depend on a healthy, robust food supply to sustain our population.



© FOTOLIA

Just how much impact does the agriculture industry have on the economy? Can we gauge exactly what would happen to the retail and grocery sectors if farming and ranching went into a deep decline?

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, 2.2 million farms exist throughout America's rural landscape. About 97 percent of these farms are operated by families. Sound like large numbers? Think again. Farm and ranch

families comprise just 2 percent of the U.S. population, says the AFBF.

Read on for other interesting tidbits from the federation, which will paint a picture of the farming and ranching industries and just how important they are to our country.

- More than 21 million American workers produce, process and sell the nation's food and fiber. This number makes up 15 percent of the U.S. workforce.

- Today's farmers produce 262 percent more food with 2 percent fewer inputs (labor, seeds, feed, fertilizer, etc.), compared with 1950.

- One in three U.S. farm acres is planted for export; 31 percent of U.S. gross farm income comes directly from exports.

- About 23 percent of raw U.S. farm products are exported each year.

- Farmers and ranchers receive only 16 cents out of

every dollar spent on food at home and away from home. The rest takes care of expensive overhead such as wages, materials, processing, production, marketing, transportation and distribution.

- U.S. farm programs typically cost each American pennies per meal and account for less than one-half of 1 percent of the total U.S. budget.

- U.S. farmers have contributed to a 50 percent decline in erosion of cropland by wind

and water since 1982 through careful planning and innovative land management strategies.

- Farmers, ranchers and other landowners have installed more than two million miles of conservation buffers, which improve soil, air and water quality.

- More than half of America's farmers intentionally provide habitat for wildlife such as deer, moose, fowl and other species.

Agriculture Museums

In the sleepy town of Las Cruces, N.M., the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum has awakened the spirit of agriculture with its recent accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums, the highest national recognition afforded the nation's museums.

No matter where you live in the country, a trip may be in order to uncover one of the nation's most acclaimed farm-inspired museums.

HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

The museum opened in 1998 and has grown into a 47-acre campus featuring a main building, three large barns, a greenhouse, roping arena, animal pens, the Historic Green Bridge (New Mexico's second-oldest highway bridge), theater, indoor and outdoor exhibits, banquet and event rooms, an amphitheater and a gift shop and snack bar.

According to the museum's website, the main building was named the Bruce King Building in honor of New Mexico's only three-term governor and a rancher who helped move the museum project forward in the 1990s.

MUSEUM ATTRACTIONS

The museum features beef cattle, dairy cattle, horses, sheep, goats and donkeys, even offering pony rides for children over the weekend.

There are plenty of live demonstrations to take in, including dairy milking, live-stock tours and educational walks through

the pistachio orchards and cactus garden.

Visitors also can stop by the Blacksmith Shop to watch professionals forge metal into tools and decorative items. Other demonstrations include dowsing, sewing, weaving and quilting.

The museum is at 4100 Dripping Springs Road in Las Cruces. For information, call 575-522-4100 or visit www.nmfarmandranchmuseum.org.

OTHER FARMING MUSEUMS

Don't plan on making the trip to New Mexico anytime soon? There is likely a farming museum in your neck of the woods. Reach out to your local tourism board to find out what's in your area.

Here is a short list of a few more farm and ranch museums that dot the U.S. landscape:

- Living History Farms (Urbandale, Iowa)
- Old Sturbridge Village (Sturbridge, Mass.)
- Mission San Luis (Tallahassee, Fla.)
- Genesee Country Village and Museum (Mumford, N.Y.)
- Kona Coffee Living History Farm (Kona District, Hawaii)
- Conner Prairie (Fishers, Ind.)

