

How good is the frozen semen?

There are a few things we at GVEH do or look for when freezing semen from a stallion or evaluating frozen semen from an outside source. The reality... is to expect that the fertility of frozen semen per cycle is approximately half the fertility of fresh semen. How worrisome is that statement. In saying that, aiming for the best possible numbers and parameters certainly can help contribute to better pregnancy results. And then, of course, there are some stallions that you could just show the mare the frozen straw and she becomes pregnant. The horse breeding game can be a bit of a gamble.

At GVEH we have set guidelines we like to follow. When readying the stallion for the freezing process, we will endeavour to first deplete his numbers with daily clean out collections to help avoid working with "stored sperm". Once he has a progressive motility (PM) of >40% and a normal morphology (anatomy of the sperm) of >50%, we will then give him a day or weekend off and complete a test freeze after rest. What we look at on the post thaw of the test freeze is mostly the progressive motility (anything above 30% is considered) at 30 minutes of being warmed. We will choose the most suitable extender and proceed with scheduled freezing. For the scheduled freezes we aim to have at least 250 million progressively motile sperm per breeding dose, we also culture a sample every 3 freezes to check for any potential bacterial growth.

When evaluating semen for an outside source, we have straws set aside to use as quality control (QC). 1-2 straws are provided from a client for the evaluation and 2 straws are used from our QC stores. We check that the straws are intact with no cracks, where the air bubble placement is (preferably in centre of the straw) and that the ball or seal are placed well before thawing the straw/s. Once thawed, we take a sample for culture and a portion of the sample is placed into some warmed extender for the motility analysis with a timer turned on for 5 mins and 30 mins. While that is warming, we then check the concentration of the sample. The concentration and the PM from the 30 min evaluation will help us to advise the number of straws to be used so as the mare receives as close to 250 million progressively motile sperm at breeding. A morphology is also completed to further give insight into the quality of the semen. A report is written upon completion.

It is important to remember that there is no easy way to test fertility. When buying frozen semen, the questions I would be asking the stallion owner/agent –

"How many straws are recommended per dose?"

"How many doses are provided per contract?"

"What is the post thaw progressive motility?"

"What is the post thaw concentration?"

"Is there a live foal guarantee on the contract?"

"What are the pregnancy rates per cycle?"

What we all need to remember is, no matter the semen type (fresh, chilled or frozen) – Motility does not equal Fertility.

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