

THE NGUNI

BREED OF THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

Nguni cattle collectively display the following traits, all of which have considerable potential for economic exploitation. All the traits taken together make Ngunis a unique breed with an important role to fill in the raising of beef in the extensive ranching areas of Southern Africa. Because the breed is young, considerable variations exist between individual cattle. Therefore, the need for objective selection in herds and performance evaluation of cattle exist. They have measured all the traits that follow objectively. They can objectively quantify the claims made here from available data relating to the breed and collected by many ranchers and researchers.

- 1 The ratio of mass of weaner to mass of mother is in the order of 45% or better. The maintenance levels and the costs of the Nguni cow herd are low in relation to the mass weaner produced when compared with other breeds of cattle kept under the same conditions¹.
- 2 Nguni cows are comparatively fertile under extensive conditions when compared with other breeds. This may be associated with the fact that they do not readily go into oestrus when they suckle their calves. On average a herd of Nguni cows will produce more calves than a herd of equal numbers of other breeds of cows kept under similar conditions².
- 3 Nguni heifers conceive early. Well-grown heifers should all have conceived by two years and three months. This makes selection for fertility in heifer herds a very realistic practice.
- 4 Nguni cows age very well and regularly produce excellent well-grown calves when they are more than twelve years old. This reduces the level at which replacements must be brought into the herd. It also means that cow selection can be very realistic in the herd³.
- 5 Nguni cows give birth easily to robust viable calves. Dystocia and the resultant problems with uterine bruising, infection, retained placenta and reduced post calving fertility are minimal. This is not because the calves are small in relation to the cows, but because of the conformation of the cow and their calves that predispose to easy calving.
- 6 Nguni cows cross well with beef bulls of the larger, fast growing breeds. They can be used for breeding terminal calves that will grow and finish well thereby further improving beef production from the cow herd.
- 7 Nguni cows handle easily if handles regularly, i.e. they have temperaments that aid management.

1 25 years of Beef Performance Testing Specialisation - Meat Board Focus - 1984

2 Recent research into the production potential of indigenous cattle with special reference to the Sanga - a review by S.J. Schoeman, South Africa. Journal of Animal Science 1989, 19 (2)

3 Resistance of Nguni, Bonsmara and Hereford cattle to ticks in a Bushveld region of South Africa - A.M. Spickett et al, 1989. Onderstepoort Journal of Vet. Science 56, 245 - 250

- 8 All Nguni cattle are tolerant to heat and sunlight. They do not need to lie up in the shade in hot weather. Libido of bulls and semen quality is not reduced in the hot summers as with many other breeds.
- 9 Nguni cattle are significantly tick tolerant. This tolerance is heritable and can be enhanced in the herd by selection. The level of dipping and consequent cost of dipping can be greatly reduced if one farms with these cattle. Nguni cattle will in accordance play a very important role in reducing tick numbers and tick challenge on farms where they are kept⁴.
- 10 Nguni cattle are tolerant of important tickborne diseases especially heartwater. In consequence Nguni herds can develop exceptional tolerance to the disease so that cattle will seldom die of heartwater. This makes these cattle the best if not the only cattle that can be run on farms in heartwater regions that have substantial game populations.
- 11 Nguni cattle kept under extensive conditions are very hardy. This trait is difficult to measure or quantify. Perhaps this can be best explained by saying that mortalities will be comparatively low and feeding and supplementation costs will be low in comparison with other cattle kept under similar circumstances.
- 12 Nguni bulls maintain excellent condition while running with the herds and do not require expensive feeding and supplementation during the off season. They are robust and agile and dependable getters for many years, i.e. they have long serving lives. Ten year old bulls can still serve well and sell well eventually.
- 13 Nguni cattle grow well on a good veld. Bulls, calves and oxen on the veld with phosphate supplementation will increase mass by ± 800 grams daily up to weaning (i.e. a 180-kg weaner), by ± 700 grams daily from weaning to twelve months (i.e. 280 kg yearling) and by ± 500 grams daily from twelve to eighteen months (i.e. 350 kg long weaner). This animal can be finished off to give an excellent 200 kg carcass at the abattoir.
- 14 In the feedlot as measured at bull testing stations, weaners gain at 1.2 to 1.35 kgs per day. Their A.D.A's are .7 to .8 grams a day and feed conversion is \pm seven kgs feed for 1 kg gain. Although this compares favourably with other cattle, Nguni breeders should perhaps aim at veld fattening animals on their own farms⁵.
- 15 Nguni cows fatten well on the veld alone. This means that good prices can be obtained for Nguni cows at the end of their productive lives without spending much on them.

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⁴ Resistance of Nguni, Bonsmara and Hereford cattle to ticks in a Bushveld region of South Africa. A.M. Spickett et al, 1989. Onderstepoort Journal of Vet. Science 56, 245 - 250

⁵ Cedara Bull Testing Station - A.D.S.R.I.