

THE EMOYENI NGUNI PROJECT

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All the seedstock (Stud) Ngunis originate from the original custodians (communal farmers) that maintained the breed over many centuries. However, there was no benefit sharing by these original custodians and in many cases they were exploited by the commercial farmers in order to get hold of their animals. During this period there was no effective control by a breed society and aspiring stud breeders collected any Nguni, no matter how inferior. One of the reasons for this is that the traditional custodians hardly ever made the better quality animals available for sale.

Currently there is still very good quality Nguni genetic material available within South Africa's communal black farming area. Recognizing the value of such genetic material, the Nguni Cattle Breeder's Society, in collaboration with the ARC, developed a process of First Registration to cater for such animals. This system also caters for emerging black farmers who want to become Nguni Stud Breeders.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the ARC launched an alien plant (Lantana and Chromolaena) control programme of some grazing areas in the communal areas of Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

The ARC organized training in basic veld management and animal husbandry in the communities. The cattle are now weighed quarterly and dehorning, castration, etc. is also done. Vegetation assessments are conducted annually. Students from the University of Zululand use these activities as practical training during their B.Sc. Agric studies.

A group of 18 livestock owners and their families secured the grazing rights to approximately 1 500 hectare of communal land, which they have almost fenced around the perimeter at their own expense. This Emoyeni livestock group has demonstrated their intentions to commercialize their livestock enterprise and all the animals are managed as one herd. They currently have 85 sexually mature females of which around 40 are pure Ngunis.

The quality of some of their animals is such that they will qualify as first registration animals with the Nguni Cattle Breeders Society. The ARC, in collaboration with the Province will assist this group to register as stud breeders and to have their cattle inspected. Capacity building will form an integral part of the initiative. The Beef Farming Business Profit Thinking Framework adapted from Clark and Timms (2001) will be implemented. This framework links profitability with the biology of farming.

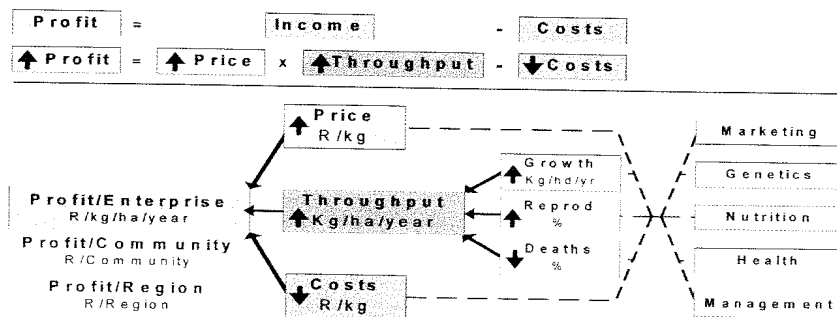
The framework will be used to focus thinking, discussion and actions, as it enables fundamental functional elements and principles of beef farming systems to be visualized (irrespective of the literacy levels).

The project will use all available technologies as needed in a farmer team and their impacts will be partitioned and

recorded. Experience from other projects showed that for quality outputs, outcomes, adoption rate and impact, same project participants or beneficiaries need to participate for an extended period of time.

If this intervention is successful it will be the first for South Africa and probably the world, where a community progressed to be stud farmers, using their own original animals.

For the first time it will be possible for communal farmers to benefit from the exceptionally high prices that are currently being paid for Stud Ngunis.



The critical success factors in the methodology, will be

- Necessary infrastructure – it includes Partnerships, Teams and Networks
- Momentum – meeting, focusing, support and reporting practiced regularly and frequently

BEEF FARMING PROFIT THINKING FRAMEWORK

possible for communal farmers to benefit from the exceptionally high prices that are currently being paid for Stud Ngunis.

The world is starting to regard animals as more than just “things” that are only part of mankind’s property, and South Africa will not escape this strong drive from animal right groups.

Society has become more concerned how animals are treated, as a consequence of animal right groups, and it is now being made part of law in many countries. For example the new Animal Welfare Bill for England and Wales states that a keeper of animals commits an offence if he fails to ensure their welfare and he can be disqualified from owning animals,

Ethics itself is not a science but a rational human activity – it deals with what we ought to do. This will inevitably vary between developed and poor countries, where the priorities for feeding humans can override the wellbeing of animals.

There are a number of theories and declarations about animal rights and welfare that will not be discussed in this article. Some of them contain very sensible guidelines, but it is somewhat difficult to take others seriously; e.g. Article 139 from the UNESCO declaration states that “an animal cadaver should be treated with respect”. (Does this mean we should not make jokes or laugh in abattoirs?)

The following “Five freedoms” are generally accepted as being important principles for animal welfare:

1. Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour
5. Freedom from fear and distress

Breeding can play an important role if these principles are applied. For example, in a stressful environment, selection against stress will lead to a reduction in discomfort (freedom 2) improving the animal’s life (freedom 5). Genetic resistance to diseases can improve freedom 3. In developed countries farm animals generally do not suffer from thirst, hunger or malnutrition; and diseases, injuries and stress are avoided for productive

reasons. In underdeveloped (developing) countries this may not be the case. However, wild animals (game) may also suffer from thirst and malnutrition in these countries, making it part of normal animal life.

It is freedom 4 that may be controversial in animal breeding. We do not really know how important it is for an animal to express a particular behaviour. For example, pigs like to have a mud bath, but is it necessary under the modern production systems? It is also normal behaviour for bulls to fight under certain circumstances – should the farmer allow such fighting to continue until a bull is injured or killed?

The Nguni’s survival, after 24 centuries of exposure to the African climate, vegetation, external parasites and African disease, attests of an acquired tolerance to these conditions.

The Nguni is adapted and hardy, and this means that by farming with Ngunis, it will be easier to meet some of the “freedom” principles associated with animals. Below are a few examples:

1. The Nguni is generally docile and this will lead to a reduction in discomfort (freedom 2) improving the animal’s life (freedom 5).
2. The high urea levels in the Nguni result in better adaptation to poor nutrition especially during winter, which will alleviate hunger and malnutrition (freedom 1).

The Nguni is the most tick resistance of all cattle breeds in South Africa and also demonstrate a degree of tolerance to tick borne disease. This contributes to freedom from discomfort (freedom 2) and freedom from pain and disease (freedom 3).

(a) BLASCO, A., 2006. *Philosophy of science and animal breeding research. Proc. 8th Wrld Congr. Genet. Appl. Livestock Prod.* 00 - 01

THE ROLE OF THE NGUNI IN ANIMAL WELFARE

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