

TERMINAL CROSSING:

A practical example

by Kevin Watermeyer

Nguni breeder (Compassberg Ngunis) • Location: Zuurplaats, Nieu Bethesda, Eastern Cape • Topography: "Sneeuberge": 70% mountain veld, 20% intermediate veld, 10% vlei veld • Vegetation: Scrubby mixed sourveld (predominantly *Merxmuellera disticha* and *Aristida Cogesta*) • Climate: Very cold, long winters and warm to hot summers • Temperatures: -14 to 38 C



Briefly

"I started crossing Nguni cows with various British breed bulls by default when I started leasing a stocked property. Initially the cows were predominantly Nguni, but not pure. I have progressively replaced the impure cows with pure Nguni cows and reduced the variation in sire breeds to just two (Black Angus and, more recently, Charolais).

I run two cow herds. A registered Nguni herd in a multi-sire system and a commercial Nguni herd with Black Angus and Charolais bulls. The average cow weight at weaning (average = 208 days) is 346 kg in the registered herd and 358 kg in the commercial herd.

Our weaning weights average at 152kg (or 44% of cow weight) in the registered herd and 187kg (or 52% of cow weight) in the cross-bred herd, resulting in a 35kg heavier weaner. In addition, Black Angus bulls have given us approximately 80% calves that are black and polled and therefore more in demand by the feedlotter. We await sufficient data to report on the results of the Charolais crosses for both weight and colour dominance. However, having spoken to several beef producers who have used Charolais bulls on Nguni cows, I am confident that the results will be at least similar.

Simply:

35kg extra wean weight @ R20/kg = R700 extra per calf, at no extra cost!

"I have found that terminally crossing my commercial Nguni herd complements our farming business in that, besides the breeding stock we sell from our registered herd, we have a ready market for our cross-bred weaners that also do well under feedlot conditions. Remember that this is marginal cattle country and our Nguni cows remain the key to our success."

Nguni cow is the ideal dam breed:

- Lowest maintenance requirement
- Fertility unmatched under veld conditions
- Ability to keep birth weight low (no dystocia)
- Genetic distance from most sire breeds gives greater hybrid vigour (heterosis)
- Indigenous, therefore adapted to all regions
- Readily available all over S.A



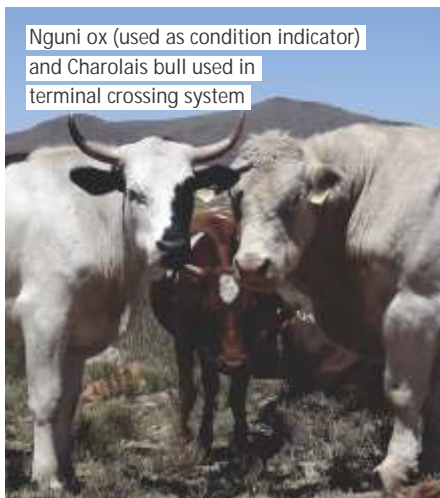
Benefits of cross-breeding

1. Bigger sire breed + genetic distance (heterosis) = heavier weaners = bigger income
 - No extra maintenance cost of cow herd
 - No extra strain on cow
 - No drop in calving percentage
2. Greater flexibility in selling age of weaners
3. Greater uniformity of weaners = greater appeal to agents = better price
4. Better growth under good conditions due to heterosis
5. Female progeny become good dams = demand for heifers as "boerkoeie"
6. Extended use of bulls (up to nine years) = lower service cost per calf

Dangers of cross-breeding

1. Wrong sire breed = low heterosis, no uniformity = little increase in income
2. Sires not adapted = management hassles or losses (deaths)
3. Progeny not as resistant to disease and drought as pure Ngunis
4. Unavailability and initial cost of bulls ■

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Nguni ox (used as condition indicator) and Charolais bull used in terminal crossing system



Sussex X Nguni tollie but they are not always red in colour



Angus x Nguni cow with her Nguni calf. These crosses are in demand as boerkoeie



Dry mountainous karoo in February 2015



Typical Nguni cow



Nguni cow and her calf licking rock salt. This is the only supplementation supplied



Nguni cow with her Angus X heifer calf. Mostly they are black in colour