

# MOTHER

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## THE COW

A Perfect Example of Social Security

Consider THE COW with her poise an  
urbanity

Doing her share of work for humanity

Her bed and her board and her  
background of scenery

Supplied by adjacent and succulent  
greenery.

The cow may regard with the utmost  
passivity

Methods and plans to control  
productivity

Her function is one of complete  
spontaneity

Ruled by a kind and beneficent deity.

Having no duties beyond her ability

Hers is a world of utmost stability.

Cared for by others from youth to  
maturity:

A perfect example of Social Security!

Taken from "Journal of the Shorthorn  
and Illawarra Breeds".

**M**other knows best" is a familiar saying most of us did not want to hear as youngsters. But for young herbivores paying attention to mother is crucial for learning where and where not to go and what and what not to eat.

Through interactions with mother, young animals learn about their surroundings – from the whereabouts of water, shade, cover, and predators to the kinds and locations of nutritious and toxic foods.

**In the beginning.** Learning about foods begins before birth as young animals experience the flavours of their mother's diet in the womb. Young animals also learn about the flavours of foods mother prefers as they suckle as those flavours are transferred through her milk. The flavours of plants are transferred to offspring in the womb and in milk, and familiarization increases the likelihood that offspring will eat those foods when they forage.

**Learning to eat.** As young animals begin to forage, they learn which foods to eat by following mother. Young animals learn quickly about new foods and they remember those foods for years. Lambs fed nutritious foods like wheat with their mothers for 1 hour a day for 5 days ate more wheat than lambs introduced to wheat without their mothers. Even 3 years later, with no additional exposure to wheat, intake of wheat was nearly 10 times higher if lambs were exposed to wheat with their mothers than if they were exposed to wheat by themselves.

One day we worked until midday with cattle mothers and their 2 to 4-month-old calves. When the herd was let to grazing a certain mother and her calf walked speedily to a certain grazing area where acacia trees were present. She and her calf were in a better condition than most of the other mothers.

She knew where and how to gather the better part of the grazing and she taught her calf to do the same.

Offspring learn to eat nutritious food by observing mother select the best food and avoid harmful foods.

**Cows are very considerate and protective mothers.** They will fend stray dogs and jackals and often stand between her calf and humans.

Cows with calves at foot used to graze in order to produce milk for the calf. When the calves are young and cannot walk long distances, the cows form "creches". A group of 5 to 12 cows will leave their calves in a suitable spot with one or two mothers tending to them while the others graze. These nursemaids will not leave the calves, not even to drink water in the heat of the day.

The changing of cow groups by the addition of other animals may cause major upsets.

**It is unfair to expect a hard-working regular cow to hold her own against new comers that upset the social ranking.** Cows with young calves at foot do not like the presence of other classes of stock.

# KNOWS BEST

“Take time to learn from the behaviour of your Nguni cattle”

**Dry stock especially steers and young heifers are by nature inquisitive and are fascinated by the process of a calf being born. They gather in numbers around the cow in labour and upset the cow. A maternal camp for heavy pregnant cows is sound procedure.**

**Take time to learn from the behaviour of your Nguni cattle.** If you want to move a cow herd and bull(s) from one camp to the other certain bulls will gather the cows in case they are removed. This is a good sign indicating good libido and care of the cows entrusted to him.

**Nguni cattle are known for their docile behaviour and good temperament. They are excellent foragers and will graze on steep slopes and in thick bush alike. The Nguni, when grazing tend to walk and graze simultaneously.** This may be indicative of a pattern of non-selective grazing.

**Study the behaviour of your cow herd.** There are many interesting, sometimes small things that can be learnt from them. It helps to understand the behaviour of the cow better so that management is in line with the ways that encourage and help them.

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