

Comparing bigger *versus* smaller cattle

Dr André Mentz | Douglas | Northern Cape | amentz24@gmail.com

Cattle farmers in Southern Africa are privileged to have a wide choice of cattle breeds for their farming operations; a variety from England, Europe, the USA, and Central Africa are well represented. Another variation of newly developed breeds is also in our midst. For many decades, the focus has been on bigger, well-muscled types of cattle which is also the aim of the officials managing the cattle improvement scheme. The stud breeders apply this offhand, not realising the negative effect on the functionality of their cattle.

The small-frame Indigenous types like the Nguni and other Sanga are latecomers in farming operations, only since the 1980s. They are considered to be inferior and are widely discriminated against in the red meat industry by the feedlots and on auctions.

About 40 years ago, research officers in Namibia decided to investigate the merit of the Sanga and collected them

from the northern communal regions of Namibia at the Omatjenne Research station near Otjiwarongo in a research project, in comparison to other well-established breeds. They evaluated the breeds' performance in three production systems of which I will discuss only the slaughter system which is widely applied in Namibia for exporting veld-raised carcasses to Europe.

| CATTLE BREED | PRODUCTION CAPACITY OF DIFFERENT BREEDS IN A PRODUCTION SYSTEM | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| | Number cows / 1000ha | Calving % & number of calves | Weankg/ 100kg cows | Growth: Wean to 27mths % | Livekg & carcasskg 27mths | Dressing % at 27mths | Nett * income: Afr=100 |
| Afrikaner | 65 | 74% / 48 | 31,0 | 106 | 423 / 234 | 53,2 | 100 |
| Hereford | 66 | 78% / 51 | 31,5 | 104 | 430 / 222 | 51,5 | 98 |
| Sanga | 83 | 92% / 76 | 45,9 | 104 | 380 / 204 | 53,7 | 147 |
| Santa Gertrudis | 65 | 78% / 51 | 37,9 | 115 | 517 / 273 | 52,8 | 124 |
| Simmentaler | 60 | 78 %/ 46 | 36,6 | 91 | 513 / 265 | 51,6 | 99 |

(*The nett income is presented as an index with the Afrikaner value being 100)

I will discuss the table per column from the left to right:

COLUMN 1: The point of departure is to compare the breeds on the basis of equal total live mass input; that is why the Sanga is represented by 83 cows;

COLUMN 2: The high fertility of the Sanga is shown by their 92% calving and delivering 76 calves;

COLUMN 3: The values represent an index for the functionality of the cow herds per 100kg live mass input;

COLUMN 4: These values also represent an index of the efficiency of the calves to perform after being weaned on veld; it shows the Santa Gertrudis performing excellent above average;

COLUMN 5: This is all about the growth of the progeny and their carcass mass when slaughtered at 27 months of age. The Sanga herd outperform the other breeds' average by 3 337kg.

COLUMN 6: The best dressing percentage of the Sanga cattle is meaningful because it represents carcasses of best grading due to their level of fat cover;

COLUMN 7: Those figures bring together everything about the performance and costs of the breeds in terms of lick supplies, tick protection, etc.; the Sanga is superior by hundreds of thousands of Rands.

CONCLUSION: The research proves that the small frame Sanga outperform every other breed by far in efficiency of production as well as in biological and economic terms in a slaughter cattle system – a massive difference (multiply the number per breed slaughtered with their slaughter mass). It also confirms the lack of perspective in the industry and on scientific level about the potential of the small frame Nguni in South Africa for delivering grass-fed beef instead of the unhealthy polluting feedlots' grain-fed product.



The Sanga/Ngunis' success arrives from two inherent capabilities namely their high fertility and early maturity in all physiological body functions, as demonstrated by the figures in the table.



The carcasses in the photo is from a consignment of Nguni oxen of a herd in Central Free State which were supplemented with dry maize leafs on veld during a dry period.

Their carcasses' details are as follows:

Carcass mass: 231kg

Grading: A/AB 2/3

Dressing percentage: 56%

(Acknowledgement to the Department of Agriculture of Namibia)

