Beefmasters: the ideal breed for commercial farmers and feedlots

According to North West beef producer Hans Coetzee, Beefmaster cattle remain highly sought-after by feedlots, thanks to the breed’s heavy weaners and fast growth rate.

Hans Coetzee, owner of Excel Beefmaster in Lichtenburg in North West, started farming Beefmasters in 1993. Although upgrading his commercial herd to the breed took quite a few years, he says it was time and money well spent.

“What we achieved is a uniform group of Beefmasters that produce good female animals for replacement, and excellent bulls to put onto the market.”

‘THIS BREED’S WEANING RATIO IS AMONGST THE HIGHEST YOU WILL SEE IN SA’

Hans selects his Beefmasters according to the philosophy of the breed’s founder, Tom Lasater. Lasater argued that farmers should select only for six essential profit-generating traits: disposition, fertility, weight, conformation, milk production, and hardness.

“The reason for our success is that we don’t select for non-profitable traits,” says Hans.

HIGH FERTILITY AND SMALL, LIVELY CALVES
Fertility, in particular, is of crucial importance for Hans.

“We have no loss of calf on the ground, your beef enterprise is going nowhere,” he says. “We produce small calves at birth, but they’re lively and strong, suckle quickly after birth with no assistance, grow fast on their mothers’ ample milk, and feed early by themselves. They have a heavy weaning weight that often surprises feedlot buyers.

“The national average inter-calving period of all Beefmaster cows at SA Stud Book is less than 400 days. He adds that more and more South African beef producers are reaping the benefits of the strict selection pressure on the fertility trait by keeping their Beefmaster bulls’ heifer calves to replace culled cows in their future breeding programmes.

HYBRID VIGOUR AND HIGH WEANING WEIGHT
The Beefmaster is a three-way cross, and the percentage of hybrid vigour inherited by Beefmaster offspring is therefore much higher than that of a two-way cross.

“This is the way we achieve higher weaning weights and calves that feedlots want to buy,” says Hans. “The Beefmaster has one of the highest weaning ratios of beef breeds in South Africa.”

He runs his heifers with his bulls when they are 18 months old.

“One of the traits I value very much is longevity. Genetically, it makes sense to have a shorter generation interval, but some of the older cows produce outstanding breeding material.

“I therefore try to keep the cow herd uniform in type and size. “Feet, walking ability, udder and traits are high on the priority list. I like to buy bulls according to their bloodlines,” he says.

SELECTING AND MARKETING BULLS
After weaning, young bulls are kept on the veld and receive a salt and bone meal lick in summer. Hans also provides extra in winter. They are kept on the veld until they are ready to be prepared for auction; this takes place at the feedlot of Majesto Beefmasters.

“Selection is done after the 18-month indices become available,” explains Hans. “The bulls that don’t demonstrate the criteria I look for are sold to the feedlot. The remaining bulls are kept, and after spending a month in the feedlot, those with potential are auctioned, while the others pay the feedlot bill.”

He sells bulls at three years of age, as they keep their condition better than younger bulls.

“These bulls also get cows in calf and keep their condition,” he adds. “I avoid overfeeding these bulls, so that they adapt more readily to their new environment and herd after the sale. They mostly go into the cow herds on arrival.”

• The Excel Beefmaster sale will be held on 20 September in Lichtenburg.

For more information, contact the Beefmaster Cattle Breeders’ Society of South Africa at 083 417 7047 or beefmastersa@stemma.co.za.

Visit beefmastersa.co.za.