Tips for buying a good-quality bull

Due to the sheer number of offspring that it can deliver, a bull has a lasting impact on a herd. It therefore stands to reason that a good bull can effectively lay the foundation of a successful beef operation. This is one area where a farmer dare not cut corners, says Erhard Prinsloo, owner of Dream World Beefmaster in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal.

“IPresso you have to sacrifice quality because of cost, rather buy a poorer-quality female animal, but don’t be stingy when it comes to buying a good bull!”

This is the earnest advice of Erhard Prinsloo, the owner of Dream World Beefmaster in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. Prinsloo says the reason for this is simple: a cow can deliver only one calf every year, while a bull can produce up to 30 calves every year, or even 60 if two breeding seasons have been implemented. This means that one bull that stays in a herd for eight years will pass its genes on to approximately 420 calves. “Quite simply, the impact of one bull on your stud or herd is far greater than the impact of a female animal,” Prinsloo explains.

It is thus crucial that a farmer buys good-quality bulls. “What makes a good-quality bull, however, is another question; it depends on your needs and the goals you have for your operation.”

Prinsloo advises prospective buyers to keep the following in mind when buying a bull:
• Determine what you need;
• Do your research;
• Buy animals at auctions affiliated with a breeders’ organisation;
• Physically examine the animals before the auction.

DETERMINE WHAT YOU NEED

“Purchase a bull that can correct the flaws in your herd. If there are no specific flaws
that need correcting, and your goal is to improve production efficiency, such as improving the fertility of your herd, producing heavier weaners, or increasing milk production, choose a bull accordingly. You need to buy the right bull to meet your needs,” says Prinsloo.

**DO YOUR RESEARCH ON WHAT IS AVAILABLE**

Every auction held by a stud farmer has a catalogue that is available to potential buyers before the sale. Each catalogue indicates:

- The bull’s sire and dam, as well as the dam’s intercalving period;
- The bull’s birthweight;
- The bull’s weaning weight;
- The bull’s growth rate; and
- A milk production value.

The goals you have for your herd should determine which of these values you emphasise.

**BUY ANIMALS AT AUCTIONS AFFILIATED WITH BREEDERS’ ASSOCIATIONS**

The Beefmaster Cattle Breeders’ Society of South Africa recently resolved that all bull calves born after 2017 must undergo DNA testing for paternity before they can be sold.

The following also applies to bulls registered with the society:

- The animal must be free of brucellosis and tuberculosis;
- The animal’s Studbook information (if DNA tests have been done) must be correct;
- The animal must be free of sexually transmitted diseases and tested for trichomoniasis;
- The animal must be approved by an official of the society and may not have any obvious hereditary defects;
- The animal must be fertile.

**EXAMINE THE ANIMALS ON THE DAY OF THE AUCTION**

“It’s a good idea to examine all the bulls at the auction on the morning before the sale,” explains Prinsloo. “This is the perfect opportunity for you to check and compare the general conformity of the animal in terms of hooves, head, build and sheath, amongst other characteristics. You can then compare the details in the catalogue with what you’ve observed to make sure that this is, in fact, the animal you want. Only once you are satisfied should you buy the bull.

“If you follow these four steps, you can be more or less certain that your bull will be free of illnesses and will improve your herd in the correct way.

“Most reputable breeders will investigate any complaints you may have of the animal after the sale.”

- Phone the Beefmaster Cattle Breeders’ Society of South Africa on 051 410 0935 or 083 417 7047, or email beefmastersa@stemma.co.za.