

Why Bonsmara cows should be your first choice



Maternal ability is an important trait in female animals of any breed. Cows must be fertile, and able to support, protect and grow their calves into healthy weaners. Bonsmara cows are renowned for this characteristic, and produce superb results in an extensive cattle operation.

Cattle farming consists of many small pieces that need to fall into place before the puzzle is complete. One piece that is crucial is the ability of a cow to not only give birth to a healthy calf every year, but also look after it well enough so that it develops into a strong weaner calf.

Primarily, this entails providing the calf with enough milk to help it grow to at least 45% of its dam's weight at weaning.

But good maternal ability involves more than supplying milk. Other important factors include the following:

- **Calving and ease of calving**

The female animal's first task is to conceive. She must then carry the

calf successfully and calve easily, without assistance. In South Africa, with its extensive grazing areas, it is not always cost-effective or even possible for a farmer or farmworker to be on hand when every calf is born.

It is crucial, too, that the cow is able to take care of the calf immediately after birth.

- **Milk**

The main task of every cow is to give the calf enough milk, and hence sufficient nutrients, to develop into a strong weaner. An adaptable Bonsmara cow should provide enough milk for the calf to grow at a rate of between 800g and 1kg a day. This will enable a calf weighing 35kg at birth to

ABOVE: Cows must be able to protect their calves and include the calf as part of the herd. (PHOTOS: SUPPLIED)

weigh 235kg at a weaning age of 205 days (seven months).

Because the Bonsmara is a beef breed, there is no need for a cow to produce more milk than its calf can use. In fact, a cow like this will end up costing the farmer money due to the higher maintenance required.

- **Protecting the calf**

With predators such as dogs, jackal, caracal and even leopard roaming many areas, a cow should be able to protect her calf. Bonsmara cows, despite their docile temperament, are known for their protective instinct, and remain aware of the whereabouts of their calves when the herd is moved from one camp to another.

- **Natural resistance and immunity**

A cow should be able to provide her calf with strong immunity to diseases and a natural tolerance to ticks. This is passed on to the calf through the cow's colostrum in the first few hours and days after birth.

THE BONSMARA COW IS IDEAL FOR USE IN CROSSBREEDING

With Bonsmara cattle thriving in harsh areas notorious for their tick populations and disease, it is evident that cows of this breed adapt to these harsh environments, and this characteristic is passed on to the calf.

ABOVE: Bonsmara cows are known for ease of calving and taking care of their offspring from birth.

ABOVE RIGHT: A weaning percentage of 45% and above is an indication of a cow with good mothering ability.

The Bonsmara cow is ideal for use in crossbreeding programmes as she is an excellent mother with low maintenance requirements. She will also do remarkably well with any British or continental breed. Moreover, her F1 calf in turn will exhibit exceptional maternal traits, while her steer calf will be an excellent beef producer in both extensive and intensive production systems.

FIRST CHOICE

The ability of Bonsmara cows to breed high-quality replacement heifers from a Bonsmara bull, or any other breed, is one of the reasons the Bonsmara has grown to become the most popular cattle breed in South Africa in the 55 years since the establishment of the breed society back in 1964.

Taking into consideration the criteria required to qualify as a breed with good maternal ability, the Bonsmara should be at the top of the commercial cattle farmer's list. This trait is not merely important to the cattle farmer; it is one of the cornerstones of a successful, profitable herd.

With female animals that are adapted and able to calve and raise strong weaners that are in demand in the feedlot, Bonsmara cows are synonymous with good maternal ability.

The number of commercial breeders using Bonsmara as their first choice as mothers is a testament to the female animal's exceptional qualities.

- Phone the Bonsmara Cattle Breeders' Society of South Africa on 051 448 6084, or email info@bonsmara.co.za.