



Bonsmara: the ideal breed for Africa

The Bonsmara, the product of decades of selection in South Africa, is becoming more and more popular in neighbouring countries. This is small wonder, considering the breed's hardiness, longevity, fertility and outstanding carcass traits.

The Bonsmara is slowly but surely gaining a foothold in Africa, becoming the beef cattle of choice in several of South Africa's neighbouring countries.

In the process, the breed is contributing towards more sustainable farming and improved food security.

Over the past few decades, several red bulls from South Africa have been introduced on communal land in Namibia, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe, and even further north. The progeny, produced in pure and crossbreeding programmes, has proved outstanding, so much so that demand for the bulls has grown exponentially. This places a responsibility on South African breeders to ensure that animals sent to other African countries are adapted to local conditions and of the right type, and represent superior breeding material.

GOOD TEMPERAMENT

The Bonsmara was bred from the Afrikaner, a well-adapted, hardy African breed that produces well from the veld under almost all climatic conditions. The Bonsmara possesses all of these traits, and its calm temperament makes it easy to farm.

It produces outstanding offspring when crossed with indigenous African cattle. In addition to benefitting from heterosis, its offspring demonstrate economically important traits such as fertility, growth ability and exceptional carcass traits.

While indigenous African cattle breeds are often well adapted and hardy, their reproduction and production abilities, as well as meat quality, often fall short. The Bonsmara can improve these herds.

TO MALAWI

Arthur de Villiers of Arcadia Bonsmaras, near Vrede in the Free State, exported 15 bulls to Malawian farmers three years ago. Now that they have yielded

excellent calves, the same farmers are requesting 50 more bulls.

De Villiers believes that the Bonsmara's unique composition, combined with decades of careful selection, are responsible for the breed's growing popularity in Africa.

Crucially, they have helped convince traditional farmers that beef cattle represents a valuable and marketable product that should be used for more than just cultural events.

REARED ON THE VELD

Johan Dormehl of Bloubuffel Bonsmaras, near Vryburg in North West, is a member of the Proveld Bonsmara Group. He has exported 30 bulls, while the group has exported a combined 150, to Botswana, Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

IT PRODUCES OUTSTANDING OFFSPRING WHEN CROSSED WITH INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CATTLE

Group members make a point of visiting prospective buyers to familiarise themselves with the conditions under which the animals have to perform.

Dormehl believes their bulls are veld-reared, with most of the bulls being kept with cows in camps of 500ha to 1 000ha for the entire year.

The Bonsmara's exceptional adaptability and combined with traits such as longevity, fertility, frame size, good claws, and tolerance of drought and heat enable the animals to perform well in Africa's harsh conditions.

In Dormehl's view, Bonsmara breeders have access to a large market, but to retain their share they have to supply animals that can maintain the Bonsmara's proven ability to perform.



ABOVE: Duncan Serapelwane, council member of Bonsmara SA talks to producers at a farmers' day in Lethlakane, Botswana

TOP: Proveld members Johan Dormehl and Hannes van der berg discuss commercial Bonsmara females with Norman Adams from Ghanzi in Botswana

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bonsmara bulls comfortably at home in the dunes of Namibia. SUPPLIED

NAMIBIA

In its almost 40 years in Namibia, the Bonsmara has become the second-largest cattle breed in the country, showing the most rapid growth over the past decade.

Its success can be attributed largely to the fact that scientifically based minimum standards for production and appearance have been established and strictly applied.

Dr Joggie Briedenhann of the well-known Hartebeestloop Bonsmaras in Namibia says that the breed's popularity has stemmed not only from its outstanding genetic traits, but from compulsory performance testing, sustainable breeding policies, and continual training of commercial and communal farmers by breeders.

In his view, the Bonsmara is growing into the beef breed of

choice in Africa. Enquiries from neighbouring countries such as Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana show that the cattle are popular among beef farmers in these areas.

Bonsmara breeders who want to export to African countries need to do their homework. Breeders have to build good relationships with leading farmers, adhere to export protocols, carry out research and try to protect the animals against diseases in the destination countries.

"They must also provide training in respect of the care and management of the cattle in the new environment," adds Briedenhann.

• Email Louis Steyl, advisor for the Bonsmara Cattle Breeders' Association of South Africa at louis@bonsmara.co.za.

Visit bonsmara.co.za. ■ FW