

The purpose of this article is to emphasize the holistic and specialised nature of commercial cattle farming. To be farming with cattle says nothing, but to say you are a *bona fide* cattle farmer driving a business enterprise is another story. The following diagrammatic illustrations and the information contained by the table that follows, will clarify some of the relevant options and decisions farmers have to make to secure a suitable end-product and best income.

Most cattle farmers are sellers of weaners. These are the most productive class in a cattle herd and backbone of the red meat industry. By doing so, producers deprive themselves and favour other competitors in the chain of red meat production to make money. The system is most costly to manage.

ALTERNATIVELY

Cattle farmers may decide to become marketers of their own veld fed slaughter cattle directly to abattoirs. This is a low costly system to manage and provides plenty of scope for decision making. Managing every animal up to its final stage of performance belongs to proudly independent cattlemen.

Quality beef originates from carcasses of normal veld-fed cattle in the
AB2/3-, B2/3- and C3/4-Grades

CHOICE OF CATTLE

Any type of cattle similar to any of our four indigenous breeds that easily fatten on veld. One of those breeds is the small-frame Nguni and the others are of medium-frame

The table that follows explain what is at stake when referring to specialized operations. In a previous article it was shown that a herds' composition should stabilise on more or less 30% in cow numbers and 24% turnover in slaughter animals per year, as is shown in the table below. These figures in practise are never constant and those in the table should be seen being direction indicators. Because we inherited well adapted small-frame and medium-frame cattle in South Africa, we always need to take it into consideration in decision making.

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Estimated values of the performance of two different types of cattle herds of equal live mass input and differences in calving rate, live slaughter mass and live mass values						
Medium-frame cows = 450kg x 200 = 90 000kg			<=>	Nguni-type cows = 360kg x 250 = 90 000kg		
Calving rate	80%	Ratio %		Calving rate	85%	Ratio %
Cows	200	<30		Cows	250	<30
Suckling calves	160	24		Suckling calves	213	24
Young stock: 12-24m	160	24		Young stock: 12-24m	213	24
Stores: 24-36m	160	24		Stores: 24-36m	213	24
Total herd size	680	--		Total herd size	889	--
Output to be slaughtered: 160 (24%) @ 435kg				Output to be slaughtered: 213 (24%) @ 370kg		
Live mass yield= 160x435kg= 69 600kg				Live mass yield= 213x370kg= 78 810kg		
Income yield= 69 600kgxR25= R1 740 000				Income yield= 78 810kgxR23= R1 812 630		

Table: The table provides estimated values for performance of two types of cattle in a sustainable cattle farming operation delivering veld fed beef. Mortalities are not taken into consideration.

The purpose of this table is not only to show how to make comparisons between different types of breeds on a just base during their production process, but also because of a few other important aspects that will assist in decision making:

- To make a fair comparison between small-frame and medium-frame cattle is to take live mass in consideration. All cattle consume fodder at the same rate per animal's weight (2,5%). So we have to compare cattle herds on base of live mass and not per animal *per se*. Medium frame cows are taken at 450 kilogram live mass and the Nguni-type at 360 kilogram. Therefore, in the table a herd with 200 medium frame cows weighing 90 000 kilogram (200x450) is compared with a herd of 250 Nguni cows also weighing 90 000 kilogram (250x360).
- The composition of both herds in this comparison is also taken on even level (<30%) concerning the ratio of the cow class to the total number of the herd. So if a farm's potential is to be stocked with 680 cattle of the medium-frame type, the number of cows should not exceed 200 (200÷680=29%). And in the case of the Nguni's herd of 889 animals, the ratio is also less than 30% (250÷889=28%) as well (see table).
- Other aspects to be taken in consideration when comparing these cattle herds are calving rate, live slaughter mass and live mass values, as is shown in the table. The fertility of Nguni females is well known and it is appropriate to take their calving rate at 85% compared to the medium frame cows' 80%. The medium-frame cattle herds' slaughter mass is taken at 435kg and the Ngunis' at 370kg (*remember slaughter mass refers to the output of all 160 and 213 animals of both herds respectively shown in the table*). Furthermore, because of conformation differences, it is justified to discriminate against the Nguni concerning its live mass value be taken at R23 per kilogram against the medium-frame slaughter cattle of R25 per kilogram respectively.

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- The final item in the table to discuss is the total live mass and income yields of the herds. It is apparent that significant differences exist between the two herds, but for the purpose of this article it cannot be proved and therefore will not be discussed. What stands out is the method to do such a comparison, and that is all.

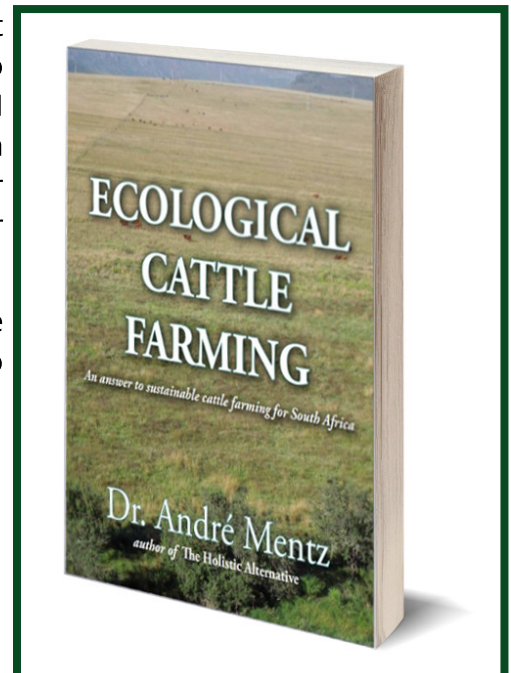
Conclusion

Commercial cattle farming needs to be seen for what it stands for. It has everything to do with the unique inner nature and purposefulness of a sustainable cattle farming operation as proposed above. I have only concentrated on a few aspects of managing a cattle herd and not even touched on the demands for utilising the veld.

It is heart breaking that in a country like South Africa very few cattle farmers are realising the benefits of ecological cattle farming and care about the consumers' wishes to obtain healthy red meat, in contrast to the products arriving from a polluting industrialised industry to be ashamed of.

As long as the representative body of red meat producers, called RPO, is not determined to do something about it, the existing position will remain. I really wish South Africa's cattle farmers could learn from their Namibian counterparts about managing a slaughter cattle system whereby delivering veld-fed prime beef for consumers in Europe!

We should spend more time on farmer's days to evaluate veld raised slaughter cattle to accustom cattle farmers to the end product of cattle farming.



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