LOWLANDS FARMING EXCELS WITH THEIR
BREEDING HERD RESULTS FOR 2014

Once again, the Lowlands Farming beef cow herd has proved that good management practices are rewarded with exciting production statistics. For some years now, owners Vaughan and Hamish Skead have been refining their management of this highly effective cow herd, to a point where staggeringly impressive production statistics have been achieved under ranching conditions.

PERFORMANCE STATISTICS

During the early spring of 2013, some 1000 open heifers of 20-22 months of age were mated using A.I. for a 21 day period beginning 1st September, and then followed by a further 42 day period of mating with their own 2 year old bulls. The resulting conception was 55% from the A.I. and the end result after bulls were used was 94.6%. Before mating the heifers were fed 10kg maize silage plus 1kg production lick daily for 6 weeks. Vaughan explains that without this steaming up, they would not have achieved such a good result. Along with this goes the dedication of the four well trained staff that carried out the successful insemination of the heifers.

After calving this coming spring, these heifers will receive the same treatment as their sisters did a year ago. The 2010 heifers were supplemented with maize silage after they calved down from June 2013 to mid-August 2013 at the rate of 8 kg silage per day. This seemingly costly practice resulted in an impressive re-conception rate of 94% for these first calf cows, with only about 3% expected to calve in October 2014. What was significant is the fact that most of these cows will calve for the second time early in August and September 2014. Vaughan believes that by spending money on improving the nutrition of young cows calving for the first time, he will be rewarded with these cows future performance in the herd. They have been set up to repeat their early calving trend for the rest of their lives. Vaughan says: “Of course, we all know that early born calves weigh heavy at weaning time and that means money in the bank”.

The past summer season has been a tough one for Lowlands Farming, as the rainfall was well below average at only 590mm whereas the normal rainfall is usually 750mm. In spite of this, the main cow herd returned a 91.7% conception rate and they weaned calves weighing an average of 231kg. The weaning percentage was an impressive 94.7% which means that only some 5% of potential calves were lost from pregnancy testing to the end of weaning!

INCLUSIVE INOCULATION PROGRAM

The two brothers believe in ensuring for minimum losses from prevalent diseases. To this end they are not shy to spend money on inoculating their herd. This includes the normal range of Clostridial diseases, Contagious Abortion, Lumpy Skin Disease, Rift Valley Fever, Bovine Viral Diarrhoea, African Red Water, Asiatic Red Water, Gall sickness, Vibriosis and the diseases which cause scouring in calves. The obvious result of this comprehensive program is that their losses from diseases are minimal.
LICK SUPPLEMENTATION

Lowlands Farming have invested in a modern and well laid out mixing plant which enables them to mix their own licks to suit their particular circumstances. Winter licks are started as early as the middle of March and the level of protein supplementation is gradually increased until cows receive on average around 280 g crude protein per day. The advantage of having their own mixing facility is that they can purchase the raw materials in bulk at favourable prices and that they can also change the composition of the licks as the winter progresses. This gives them the opportunity to increase protein levels as the winter progresses and then to add a little energy when the cows begin calving.

Vaughan also places great emphasis on using Browse Plus in his winter licks and believes that this increases the utilisation of the spared winter veld. Another important factor is that Vaughan believes in not stopping the feeding of winter licks too soon in spring.

BREEDING POLICY AND BULL SELECTION

For many years this well-known herd has provided in the region of 70-80 bulls annually for the beef breeders of South Africa. The now famous Lowlands Cock and Bull Sale is still one of the major social events of the year but more importantly gives serious cattle farmers the opportunity to acquire well-bred and well selected young bulls of a high quality. Since purchasing the herd from their neighbour Barry Symons, Vaughan and Hamish have focused on introducing superior genetics to improve the quality of the bulls on offer. The long proven practice of only using selected two year old bulls in the herd and then offering all of these for sale as three year olds has been continued.

This past summer some 150 yearling bulls were raised on summer grazing near Kamberg and have now returned to the home farm in the Lowlands Valley to be selected and prepared for sale. After being subjected to a Veld Bull test during the summer, around 50 two year old bulls have been set aside for use in the herd next summer, and some 40 of their brothers will be offered for sale as two year olds. At the upcoming 35th Annual Bull Sale on 1st August, 2014, 30 odd three year olds will be offered in addition to the above two year olds.

At the recent selection parade, Barry Symons remarked that it was very evident that some of the new genetics introduced over the past few years has resulted in some really superior animals coming through in the selection process.

MISSION AND VISION

It is obvious that the two brothers, Vaughan and Hamish have a passion for breeding superior beef animals which can perform off natural grazing with a minimum, yet sensible supplementation, from home grown and purchased feeds. The results of their management practices have proved that this vision can be achieved successfully and that the accompanying financial benefits are rewarding.