

# Working with a system, works

**John Roos** and Derick Orsmond aim to breed Drakensberger cows that produce a calf every year. The most important factor for them is that the cow must be veld-reared and produce well without assistance from a vet or expensive supplements. **Gerhard Uys** reports.

**J**ohn Roos of Buffalo Valley breeds Drakensberger cattle on 1 650ha in the Carolina district. About 70% of this land was bought by Derick Orsmond of Infracor Stud Breeders and a complementary herd of stud Drakensbergers was established. While the aim of Buffalo Valley is to keep the herd closed, Infracor Stud Breeders decided to open the gene pool to utilise the good qualities in other Drakensberger stud lines. This is done with embryo flushing, artificial insemination, the SA Stud Book Logix system, and the new Genomic programme being developed by the Agricultural Research Council and its partners.

Buffalo Valley was established when John and a partner, Frank Poulter, started a milk production business with veld-reared cows. They used dairy breeds at first, but found that the cows that yielded the greatest volume of milk under Highveld conditions were the 'Veld Friesians', which they later identified as Drakensbergers.

"This convinced us to breed Drakensbergers," John says.

## WELL-ADAPTED

Drakensbergers are well adapted to different climatic conditions, are tick- and disease-resistant, and produce small calves. This translates into risk-free calving, while they are also mild-tempered, he says.

Today, veld-reared, low-maintenance cows form the basis of their operation. The cows comply with the Drakensberger Cattle Breeders' Society's performance testing and inspection criteria, contributing to the improvement of the breed.



John and Derick also aim to breed affordable bulls from the veld that can breed with 30+ cows in a three-month breeding season, without needing supplements.

## THE HERD

The herd comprises 180 breeding cows, with a bull:cow ratio of 1:35. "Our herd is closed. We cross between three dam lines in the herd. Occasionally, we bring in herd sires from half-related herds," John says. He uses artificial insemination only if a trait is lacking in his herd.

Birth weights of 36kg, and weaning weights at 205 days of 228kg (for bulls) and 216kg (for heifers), are standard for the herd. Despite 2015 being a dry year, a 92% conception rate was achieved. Heifers are mated from 15 September to 30 January, and cows from 1 November to 30 January.

John envisages that in 10 years they will have a smaller herd, and concentrate on muscling with good breeding values.

The cattle are also veld-tested on the farm using VBRSA

**ABOVE:** John Roos aims to breed cows from the veld that produce a calf every year without costly supplements. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

growth tests for extensive veld conditions. In addition, John extends the test throughout the year as an unofficial on-farm test.

## PASTURE MANAGEMENT

Grazing on the farm consist of a mix of sourveld, red grass and *Eragrostis plana*. An additional 175ha *Eragrostis* and 40ha kikuyu make up the planted pastures. The carrying capacity is one LSU/3ha, and is utilised as one LSU/1,86ha for six months of the year, whereafter cattle are moved onto spare camps. There are 80 camps with water cribs fed by fountains and boreholes.

About 50% of the farm is burnt after the first rain, and six weeks after burning new shoots are ready to be grazed. Burnt veld is grazed to a height of 100mm and cattle are rotated to another camp until the veld has recovered. Cattle are then moved to spare camps until calving, and then onto hay and *Eragrostis* until summer veld is ready.

During winter, the animals are kept on a maintenance lick, and in summer on P6 Phosphate lick.

## CAREFUL PLANNING

The Buffalo Valley production system has a finely tuned monthly calendar that forms the backbone of the operation.

"When you use the veld as base [for production], you're forced to select animals that fit into the system," John says. "Every cow deserves a chance. But if she doesn't conceive after being given a fair chance, she is culled. First-calf heifers are, however, put to the bull again, and marketed as in-calf cows."

## A SYSTEM THAT WORKS

### • August

Normal calving season begins. Cows and calves are weighed and ear codes are cut. Both cows and calves are weighed two days after calving. A maintenance lick is provided. Bovine venereal disease (BVD) and Vibrin vaccinations are given to heifers that have to be mated in September.

Cows on 'spare' veld are moved onto hay as soon as they have calved. Heifers are weighed to ascertain one-year weight.

### • September

First-calf heifers are mated. Two-year heifers are mated on 15 September. Calves born in August are dehorned. Cows and new-born calves are weighed within two days of calving and given a maintenance lick.

'Spare' camps are burnt and the remainder are rested.

Vaccinations against lumpy skin disease and three-day stiff-sickness are administered, and a long-acting agent is given for ticks.

All animals receive hay.

### • October

Calves born in September are dehorned. Cows and calves are weighed within two days



JOHN ROOS



of birth. Cattle are kept on hay, with a maintenance lick.

Cows are vaccinated against BVD after calving.

Year-old bulls begin VBRSA growth tests on the veld and receive a P6 phosphate lick.

### • November

Cows are mated and bulls are removed from heifer camps.

Calves are dosed against tapeworm. Cows go to the veld and receive a P6 phosphate lick. Dehorning and weighing continue.

All animals are vaccinated against spleen disease, blackquarter, lumpy skin disease, botulism and three-day stiff-sickness. Multimin and vitamin A are administered and Ivomex Gold is given for parasites. Bovine tuberculosis and Bovine malignant catarrhal fever (BCMF) tests are performed.

One-year-old bulls are weighed every two weeks, with two-year-old bulls undergoing veld-testing.

### • December

Cows are still on the veld with P6 lick. Animals are dipped if necessary. Calves are dosed for internal parasites.

Calves receive a booster for blackquarter and botulism four weeks after their first vaccination.

Hay production begins.

### • January

Cows are put onto the veld with a P6 lick. Multimin and vitamin A are administered. Bulls are removed from cows at the end of January. Young animals are dosed against liver fluke and wireworm.

First-calf cows and calves are weighed for weaning weights.

### • February

Calves from first-calf heifers are weaned. Calves are vaccinated against BVD and dosed for tapeworm.

### • March

Cows and calves are weighed for weaning weight. Heifers are weighed for 18-month weight. Cows are put on the veld with a P6 phosphate lick.

VBRSA growth tests are concluded. Breed society selection

for 15- to 18-month-old animals begins. Selected animals are branded. On 15 March, pregnancy testing begins. Cows that fail to fall pregnant are culled.

### • April

Veld phase testing of veld bulls is stopped and rounding off for auction starts. Beesvet concentrate and hominy chop is fed to bulls kept on spare veld and hay.

Dosing for lint- and tapeworm is undertaken. All calves are vaccinated for BVD, blackquarter, botulism, spleen disease, red water and anaplasmosis. Heifers are vaccinated against brucellosis and vibriosis. Weaner calves are branded. Cows are still on the veld with a maintenance lick. Calves are kept on kikuyu with a maintenance lick.

Winter veld testing for bulls commences. Bulls are tested for fertility and Trichomoniasis.

### • May

Cows are on the veld with a maintenance lick and calves are kept on kikuyu with a maintenance lick. First-calf heifers receive Ivomec, Multimin and vitamin A injections.

### • June

First-calf heifers start calving.

Cows and calves are weighed two days after birth. Umbilical cords are cut, and calves injected with sulphur. All animals are placed on spare veld with a maintenance lick. Cows are moved onto hay with a maintenance lick after calving.

### • July

First-calf cows calve until the end of July. Calves born in July are dehorned. Cows and calves are weighed two days after birth. Year-old heifers are weighed. Start adaptation for bulls.

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