

Why a Gauteng businessman chose the Drakensberger

Sean Kramer is a successful businessman and a weekend farmer. As such, he needed a profitable breed that could generate income without much attention or inputs. He spoke to **Wayne Southwood** about why the Drakensberger is the perfect breed for his part-time operation.



Sean Kramer farms Drakensbergers on his farm, Hoëbult, in Vrede in the Free State. Sean is careful to ensure that his herd receives adequate feed during winter, which has resulted in strong, healthy cows and calves.
WAYNE SOUTHWOOD

Self-made businessman, Sean Kramer, and his wife, Glynda, are weekend farmers who run commercial Drakensbergers on their 1 300ha farm, Hoëbult, near Vrede in the Free State. Sean is the co-owner of Assign Services, a business support services company.

Having grown up on the family farm near Ogies in Mpumalanga, Sean always longed for a farm of his own. But this dream took many years to realise.

After matriculating from Eden College in Johannesburg, he completed his national service, and worked for Woolworths for two years. At 23, he started his own business, and the success of this enabled him to pursue his farming ambitions.

Before purchasing their farm, Sean and Glynda became friends with Rodney Neuman, a prominent Drakensberger stud breeder in Vrede. Rodney played a prominent role in locating the farm and choosing the breed, and remains the Kramers' friend and mentor.

THE BENEFITS OF THE DRAKENSBERGER

As Sean and Glynda are weekend farmers, they wanted to invest in a breed that did not require much attention and would be profitable with minimum inputs.

"Drakensbergers are very well-adapted to this area, calve easily and have good temperaments. Bulls are generally docile, and low maintenance," he says.

Sean started his operation in January 2004 with 100 commercial heifers and seven stud bulls, which he bought from Rodney Neuman, and 60 other commercial heifers, which he purchased from local breeders. Twelve years later, Sean and Glynda have a commercial herd of 400.

Their cows are typical Drakensbergers: they are medium-framed, feminine and have a fine bone structure and good body capacity. They

also have excellent udders with high milk volumes, and are good mothers that are protective of their calves.

Drakensbergers are renowned for their bone to meat ratio, which is the highest of all breeds.

Sean's cows weigh between 470kg and 500kg. The average birthweight is 38kg, while the average weaning weight at seven months is 230kg. The herd's conception rate last season was 85%.

BREEDING AND FEEDING

The breeding season starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of January, with calving from July to September. Sean has 16 stud bulls, and one bull covers between 20 and 25 cows. In mid-April, cows are tested to determine if they are in-calf; those that are not are sold or culled.

Calves are weaned at the end of April or May. According to Sean, Drakensbergers do particularly well in the feedlot as they have an excellent feed conversion ratio. His calves are in high demand, and he received R21/kg for weaners last season.

Hoëbult consists mainly of sweet veld, with red grass (*Themeda triandra*) particularly prominent. The average annual rainfall is about 700mm, and the farm's carrying capacity is 3,25ha/LSU.

Vrede winters can be particularly severe and it is crucial to make adequate feeding provision. Most farmers in the area sustain their cattle with maize stover and hay during winter. Sean leases his 140ha maize lands to his neighbour on condition that his cattle can graze the stover.

Sean has 80ha of weeping lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*), which he cuts and bales. He produces an average of 1 000 large, round bales a year.

His herd grazes maize stover from July to October, depending on veld condition. This is



TOP: Sean Kramer (right) with friend and mentor, Rodney Neuman, on the maize stover lands.

ABOVE: During winter, Sean's commercial Drakensberger cows and calves graze maize stover, and are supplemented with hay and protein licks.

supplemented with *Eragrostis* bales and a winter protein lick consisting of salt, maize, cotton oil and Molatek's Meester 20.

A phosphate lick is provided in summer. Due to this feeding regimen, Sean's cows and calves remained in excellent condition during winter.

HEALTHY PROFITS

"From a financial point of view, it was the right decision to farm Drakensbergers, because of the ease of the operation. Pregnancy and calving percentages have been good, they grow well, and weaning weights are good. Drakensbergers are not called the profit breed for nothing," Sean says.

He warns against overgrazing, a mistake he made at one stage. This resulted in a decline of his herd's fertility, decreased weaning weights and the destruction of his veld. Fortunately, by reducing his cattle numbers and correcting his mistake, he was able to

overcome these challenges and reverse the damage.

Sean plans to breed uniform, healthy, highly productive animals. He relies on the advice of experts such as Rodney to assist him in selecting replacement heifers. Sean selects 30 heifers with the best conformation to enter the breeding herd every year. The most important criterion for culling cows in the breeding herd is the inter-calving period: every cow must calve every year, and non-performers are culled.

The longevity of Drakensberger cows is exceptional, with many breeding at 10 years or older. The only limitation to this is the state of their teeth. All of Sean's aged cows are inspected; if their teeth are in reasonable condition and they are in-calf, they are not culled.

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