

Bull selection in the spotlight at the 2023 LRF Stockman School

By Christal-Lize Muller and Izak Hofmeyr

Last year's Livestock Registering Federation (LRF) Stockman School at Aldam in the Free State was the fifteenth of its kind. The theme "Profit drivers in bull selection" was approached from different angles during the programme.

The programme commenced with a look at the agricultural environment in its entirety, with Prof Theo Venter from the University of Johannesburg reviewing the future role of the livestock industry and discussing its contribution to South Africa's gross domestic product. He was followed by Mooketsa Ramasodi, director-general of agriculture, land reform and rural development, who emphasised traceability and animal health.

Prof Phillip Strydom from the ARC-Animal Production Institute and Stellenbosch University (SU) discussed the implementation of a meat grading system to increase the value of red meat. Prof Dietmar Holm from the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Pretoria (UP) closed the school's opening session. He focussed on the reproductive health of bulls and stated that reproductive capabilities stand on three legs, namely health and biosecurity, genetic merit and freedom from any known genetic disorders, and physical capabilities to impregnate at least 30 cows in a limited breeding season.

Anri Strauss, ruminant specialist at Chemuniqué, stated in her contribution titled "Lifetime nutritional management of bulls" that breeders must first know where they want to go before they can get there. Breeding a profitable, efficient bull starts with the health of his mother when she conceives.

Next up was Jan van Zyl of Kroon Vee Brahmans near Vryburg, who explained his method for selecting bulls. He starts

by studying the weaknesses in the breed and turning them into strengths in his herd. Studying pedigree performance, especially on the bull's maternal side, is crucial.

He was followed by Prof Leon Prozesky of Path Diagnostics Africa, who discussed suspicious deaths and disease outbreaks, and Prof Kennedy Dzama, vice-dean of the Faculty of Agrisciences at SU, who touched on the state of genomics in Southern Africa and its impact on bull selection.

Highlights of day two

The focus of day two was on the genetic aspects of bull selection. Two Australians discussed Breedplan's selection tools. Paul Williams, advisor at Australia's Agricultural Business Research Institute (ABRI), focussed on bull selection for genetic progress, while Dr Steve Miller, director of genetics and breeding at the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU), looked at Breedplan's so-called single-step genomic evaluation.

Selection for meat quality currently has no real economic value in South Africa, although a number of breeders have been selecting for these traits over the years. Jody Young, a master's student at the UP, addressed the complexity of this subject.

Another science that is gaining ground is the measurement of net feed intake. Lisa Rumsfeld of Vytelle explained the benefits



Erin-Joy Graham, Molatek's factory manager in Malelane, with the Molatek/Veeplaas/Breedplan Stud Breeder of the Year, Heinz Gruhn of the Otongovi Hereford stud in Namibia. (Photograph: Izak Hofmeyr)

of this concept. Feed efficiency can potentially lower a herd's feed consumption, which can have a significant effect on profit margins. She was followed by UP master's student, Megan Hilton, who investigated technological tools for precision farming in the feedlot.



Some of the five-star performers who were given recognition for completeness of performance. From the left are Bianca Lueesse of Lichtenstein Simmentalers, Johan Styger of BTB Simmentalers, and André van der Merwe of Wouman Brangus. (Photograph: Izak Hofmeyr)



Elandri de Bruyn, winner of the Michael J Bradfield Memorial Scholarship, with Paul Williams of the Agricultural Business Research Institute (ABRI) in Australia. (Photograph: Christal-Lize Muller)

The afternoon programme consisted of a series of breakout sessions – each focussed on an essential aspect of bull selection. An industry business meeting was also held, during which different challenges facing the red meat industry were discussed.

Improvement of carcass traits

The final day started with a presentation by Paul Williams on selecting for improved carcass traits. He was followed by Kobus Bester, breed director of the Simbra Cattle Breeders' Society, who discussed the wealth of information contained in an auction catalogue.

Prof Frikkie Nesor from the University of the Free State talked about the value of performance-tested bulls, and the day was closed by well-known agricultural consultant, Dr Louis du Pisani, who looked at the value of quality veld management and soil health to maximise profitability.

Namibian stud breeder excels

Various awards were made at the gala dinner, the most important being the announcement of the Molatek/Veepplaas/Breedplan Stud Breeder of the Year. This year the award went to Heinz Gruhn of the Otongovi Hereford stud in Namibia. Heinz and his wife, Almut, have succeeded in developing their stud to the highest level over the past 27 years. Their stud has achieved a rating of 4,5 to 5 stars in the Breedplan evaluation system.

Leaders in the industry

Maria Tswayi from Hertzogville in the Free State received an Absa

certificate of recognition for her many achievements as an up-and-coming livestock farmer.

The BKB recognition certificate for service to the industry went to Johan Styger, vice-president of the LRF and owner of the BTB Simmentaler stud near Hartbeesfontein in North West. Among others, Johan was honoured for his incorporation of easy-to-use equipment for the genetic improvement of beef cattle in Southern Africa.

Scholarship award

Elandri de Bruyn, former chief operating officer at the Wagyu Cattle Breeders' Society of South Africa, was the first recipient of the Michael J Bradfield Memorial Scholarship at the University of New England in Australia. This scholarship is funded by this university and ABRI, and offers an MSc or PhD student the opportunity to further their studies at AGBU.

The LRF will also offer a scholarship funded by the proceeds of the Stockman School that will assist a postgraduate student in animal breeding and genetics to further their studies at a South African university.

Completeness of performance

Unistel's Completeness of Performance Herd of the Year award for 4,5-star herds went to Riaan Theron of RAT Brahmans, Christopher Sparks of Mount Olive Brangus, John and Tracey Devonport of Devlan Limousins, Derick le Roux of Xourel Limousins, Arné Grobbelaar of Glen-Aggy Simbras, Diethelm Metzger of the Kamab Simbra stud, Llewellyn Angus of Wisp-Will Simmentalers and Simbras, Werner and Dagmar Wilckens of Ondeka Simbra, and René Krafft from Ibenstein Simmentaler.

The awards for five-star herds went to Riaan Theron of RAT Brahmans, Goedgenoeg Boerdery's Goedso Brangus stud, André van der Merwe's Wouman Brangus stud, Johan Styger of BTB Simmentalers, Bianca Lueesse of Lichtenstein Simmentalers, TJ Muller of Wilsim Simmentalers, Oggenstond Boerdery's Oggenstond Simmentaler stud, the Schneider

family's Simmentaler stud, and Bertus and Dewald Walters of Walsim Simmentalers.

The Namibian 4,5-star herd winners were Alex de Koning of Rapa Brahmans, Bianca Lueesse of Bramarein Brahmans, Ebbe Fischer of Wokuma Brahmans, and the Schneider family's Okabra Brahman stud. Hagen and Birgit Eggert of the Harrobi Brahman stud won the five-star Namibian herd award.

The winners of the LRF's new special award for the completeness of herds that have had five-star recordings in the past five years were André van der Merwe from Wouman Brangus, Johan Styger from BTB Simmentalers, and Bianca Lueesse from Lichtenstein Simmentalers.

Proven bulls

Vytelle's Proven Bull of the Year award went to Charlotte Schuite of Heelbo Farm's Bradford bull, BB17169, Sydney and Mark Hunt of the Hunt Brahman stud's bull, HBSG1446, and the Brangus bull LR17615 belonging to several breeders.

Dennis Magagane of the La Reina Limousin stud's bull, XRL1638, Riaan van Zyl of AP van Zyl farm's Simbra bull, VBG1612C, Willem Botha of Tendele Farm's Simmentaler bull, LN1711, and Ernst Penzhorn of the Neposetem Trust's Wagyu bull, BB150128, were also awarded.

Best cow groups

The winners of the John Deere Cow Group of the Year were Ralf Rodewald of Rodewald farm (Braford), Jan van Zyl of Kroon Vee (Brahman), Tiaan Cobbold of the Cobbold Trust (Brangus), AJ du Toit from La Rhone Agri (Limousin), Arné Grobbelaar from AG Grobbelaar Boerdery (Simbra), Dr Peet du Toit from Econotech Farming (Simmentaler), and Johan de Vos from Stella Wagyu. **LRF**

For more information, visit www.stockmanschool.co.za or phone Charmaine Alberts on 082 922 3747. Article courtesy of *Stockfarm December 2023*.