

International Performance Testing System for Namibian Producers

The registration of stud animals has been a primary function of the Namibian Stud Breeders' Association for a number of years. At a function of the Association earlier this month, it not only opened its new office in Auas Valley Shopping Centre, but proudly hosted an introduction to BREEDPLAN - which it will administer - by Mr. Michael Bradfield of Agricultural Business South Africa.

This system is considered a great technological advancement for the Association, not only because it facilitates all future stud registrations, but furthermore because it provides information regarding the performance and evaluation of stud stock.

According to Mr. Bradfield, the system has gained ground in the South African Brahman, Brangus, Braford, Simmentaler and Simbra stud associations. In addition, all 18 societies of the Namibian Stud Breeders' Association have joined BREEDPLAN International.

The system is currently used by 25,000 breeders in 13 beef producing countries worldwide and, because it will level the playing field with their foreign competitors, progressive Southern African breeders are anxious for its implementation. The system is simply the most effective and efficient method to promote stud advancement on a global scale.

Implementation of the system has led to improved breeding in South Africa in particular. Since joining BREEDPLAN, for example, performance testing of the Simmentaler society and South African Brahman has increased from 50% to 72% and from 106 breeders to more than 300 breeders respectively.

The new BREEDPLAN technology makes it incredibly easy for breeders to carry out performance testing. Integrated with BREEDPLAN is an advanced MS-Windows herd management program, HerdMASTER, which enables producers to transfer data to their societies electronically and receive results. The forms are easy to use and only characteristics making an economic contribution to the herd are measured. Reproduction continues to remain the most important characteristic and BREEDPLAN breeders worldwide have made remarkable improvements to this characteristic in the past decade. Due to the fact that all registrations, achievements and evaluations are performed by one office, the relevant societies can furthermore provide improved service to their members.

The system provides added value for breeders by making breed values for reproduction, growth and carcass characteristics available, enabling improvements to be made to these characteristics. BREEDPLAN is currently engaged in incorporating new DNA technology, whereby testing of a hair sample on characteristics such as fleshiness can be selected, into the system. BREEDPLAN furthermore affords many societies and associations their first opportunity to participate in international analysis. A prime example of this function is the American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Hereford associations, which all use BREEDPLAN and comprise a combined database of more than 20 million animals (approximately 4 to 5 times the total database of all beef associations in Southern Africa). Data for such associations is combined to enable international analysis.

BREEDPLAN and *Landbouweekblad* have joined forces to launch a fantastic new competition; the *Landbouweekblad*/BREEDPLAN national breeder-, cow group- and bull-of-the-year competition. The Voermol Beef Farmer of the Year has been included in this competition. Pick 'n Pay, with a total commitment of ZAR 1 million over a 5-year period, is the main sponsor of the competition. Other large sponsors include First National Bank and Bayer. All Southern African breeders, including Namibians, will be able to participate in the competition.

Although the BREEDPLAN system requires an annual budget of ZAR 10 million to maintain programming standards, it has direct access to ZAR 420 million in research funds from the massive Australian Beef CRC Program and is not dependent on state subsidies. Performance information, in the form of BLUP stud values, was already made available in 1985 for

BREEDPLAN herds. Technology in genetic services is accelerating at a remarkable pace and our Southern African breeders will be able to remain at the forefront of this new technology.

Finally, to describe the actual value of the system to the breeder: After sourcing a South African Simmentaler stud bull from the BREEDPLAN web site, which attracts 700,000 visitors (please feel free to browse the new search functions at www.agribsa.co.za), a Canadian farmer recently purchased the animal for a sum of ZAR 80,000. International buyers regard BREEDPLAN performance figures as highly reliable and therefore take great pleasure in buying bulls from BREEDPLAN breeders.

For further information about BREEDPLAN, please contact the Namibian Stud Breeders' Association at 061-235168.