

THE NGUNI: A CASE STUDY

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The Nguni is a hardy breed uniquely adapted to the South African environment. Regarded as inferior in the past, it was decimated by government decree and its gene pool diluted through replacement and cross breeding with exotic stock. The recent recognition of its adaptive traits led to its evaluation and development as a beef breed in the commercial sector. Simultaneously, a mistaken perception of the breed's inferiority arose in the traditional sector, despite the fact that it was a low maintenance breed ideally suited to the low input farm systems of the communal farmer. This case study describes the breed and illustrates the potential of the Nguni as a beef breed. A project with the infrastructure required for reintroducing the Nguni breed was initiated in selected communities. In the past, projects for the introduction of exotic cattle breeds into the communal sector invariably failed. This project included support systems, programmes for the improvement of management, a development programme and a marketing system to facilitate the sale of animals at market related prices.

A total of thirty-five selected Nguni bulls were introduced into five communities in the Northern Province and six in the Eastern Cape Province. These communities had organised farmer groups that were willing to contribute a minimal amount towards the maintenance of the bulls. A further supply of 10 bulls/annum is available.

Problems encountered included a lack of qualified staff for the monitoring of the project and a collective lack of grazing, herd, reproductive and health management. Minimal infrastructure within the communal lands and a resultant lack of record keeping are further restraints. In addition, the land tenure system aggravates the situation, as individuals often have neither right of possession nor the right of prescription for its use.

The project is in its early stages and certain risks and assumptions were made at its inception. Amongst these are that the animals produced will be of market quality, that available resources can support the increased production and that there are no a major droughts or disease outbreaks. The success of the project also depends on the farmers themselves, as they will have to accept drastic changes to their current way of producing animals.

This project is designed to show that the development of the Nguni breed in South Africa supports the concept of conservation through utilisation in the traditional farming sector.