

Breed for long-term sustainability

Even though he grew up as a city boy, Dan Kriek never doubted becoming a farmer. As a child, he often visited the family farm in the Tweeling district during holidays. The farm was bought in 1934 by his great-grandfather.

After Matric Dan and his twin brother, Albert, attended the University of the Free State to study agriculture. Albert was interested in agronomy and Dan in animal science and both performed the trials for their M-degrees on the farm. In 1991 they started farming in a partnership.

Since then Albert started working with Link Seed and is currently their chief agronomist while Dan, apart from the farm, became involved in organised agriculture. Currently he is president of Free State Agriculture and was recently elected vice-president of Agri SA.

"I remember having to do a paper in standard four on what I wanted to become. I didn't have any doubt about becoming a farmer. I remember writing in the paper that there are no fixed hours in farming, no fixed salary and that one must be able to overcome serious setbacks."

A love for South Devons

Dan's love for the South Devon breed also started there, because as long as he can remember there were South Devons on the farm. However, the idea of starting a Devon stud only took root in 2001.

"Albert handled the crop farming and I the livestock, but I always had the idea of doing something that could bring more diversity and value-addition to our farm. The end result was the Bellary South Devon stud.

Utilising all possible technological aids to develop the stud as fast and as good as possible, is one of Dan's objectives.

"I don't think everyone realises how

much value you can add to your cattle herd by doing things right when it comes to measuring, selecting and buying the right bulls for ten years. It isn't necessary to complicate things too much. Simply select your bulls according to BLUP figures and the production records of their mothers and grandmothers. The result is amazing."

Intercalving periods

The current average intercalving period (ICP) of his own stud is 379 days. "In an article in the 2014 South Devon Journal Jaco Heckroodt, an agricultural economist at VKB, indicated the cost difference between a cow with a short ICP and one with a longer ICP, especially over an extended period such as ten calves."

A pitfall for many aspiring stud breeders is that they regard stud breeding in terms of the bulls they plan to sell. He says that while it is the cherry on top, it does take time.

"A stud only bears fruit after 20 to 30

years if you constantly follow the correct breeding policy for your conditions and environment. In this way you build a cowherd from which you can breed exceptional sires. Unfortunately we tend to neglect available technological aids and to forget the fundamentals of good breeding, choosing to rather follow the latest fashion trend. The result is a lack of constant and progressive breeding in a predetermined direction."

Reinvest in your herd

Currently his Devon herd consists of 120 stud and 250 commercial cows. The two groups are managed in exactly the same manner.

"I believe that there are two groups of animals on the farm that have to receive special attention – the first-calve heifers and the two-year-old bulls. The stage in which both groups find themselves, is the determining stage of their lives.

"The first-calve heifers are under



To Dan the ideal cow is one that re-concepts as first calf heifer with an inter-calving period (ICP) of about 400 days, and afterwards an ICP of between 365 and 380 until she is removed from the herd due to age.



The cow BL03-72, that received the Farmer's Weekly Elite award.

Dan Kriek in the veld with his cattle.

pressure to perform and if you supply them with the necessary supplements, they will reward you handsomely for the rest of their productive lives. The same goes for the bulls. It is vital not to give them too many cows. My rule of thumb is that a 24-month-old bull should not be put with more than 24 cows and a 25-month-old animal not with more than 25 cows."

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The ideal cow

To Dan the ideal cow is one that reconceives as a first-calve heifer with an ICP of approximately 400 days, and afterwards an ICP of between 365 and 380 until she is removed from the herd due to age.

"To me the most important measure is whether the cows can survive throughout the year on redgrass veld and produce a calf every year. If the cow receives crop residues to utilise in winter, it is a bonus."

To Dan the decisive traits of a Devon are its high fertility and calm temperament. "For years the Devon has been at the forefront in respect of ICP. When it comes to temperament, one has to be able to work with the animals in the veld. If a newborn

calf has trouble getting to the teats, we can gently move the cows into a corner and get underneath them to guide the calf.

"The animals also exhibit good growth because it is originally a dual-purpose breed. We have to deliberately select for lower birth weight, which is something we manage effectively. However, due to good milk production our calves grow exceptionally well."

In 2014 he received the Farmer's Weekly award for one of his cows and he has also been awarded the BLUP Bull of the Year Award for a third time.

Selection criteria must prevail

The next objective of the Devon Cattle Breeders' Society is to establish the poll gene, so that polled cattle become the

norm and not the exception.

Any livestock farmer's policy should be to buy the best bull or ram he can afford, because of the enormous influence this animal will have in his herd. When he selects a bull, he divides the selection criteria into thirds.

"First is the bull's BLUP figures measured against the average of the breed and that of my own herd. Second is the production data of the mother and two grandmothers, and the last third is what I see in front of me. All of these aspects have to talk to me before I become interested in a bull."

For more information, call Dan Kriek on 082 944 0566. 



One of Dan's polled bulls.