Meyer and Nico Mentz farm in the vicinity of Ermelo, Mpumalanga, where they run the Pathem Droughtmaster stud, a commercial cattle herd and a sheep farming enterprise. Meyer says they had previously farmed a pure breed of Taurus cattle which they used on their commercial herd. However, adaptability, fertility and calving problems under challenging conditions proved to be a struggle.

**A new direction**
This led them to consider a breed that could meet the requirements for their operations and environment. In this regard, the Droughtmaster was the solution and this breed with its excellent traits has proven itself time and again.

Although the region they farm in is dominated by sourveld, the Droughtmaster is more than capable of adapting to the environment and maintaining its condition year round. The Mentz’s also appreciate the breed’s uniformity.

Droughtmaster cows possess excellent maternal traits and raise their calves well. Since they’ve started using Droughtmaster bulls in their commercial herd, the birthweight of their calves has dropped significantly, leading to lower mortality rates. The calves’ weaning weight has also increased by 10 to 15%.

The offspring are medium-framed animals that adapt well to the extensive conditions of the Highveld. The adaptability of the Droughtmaster and its ability to perform better with less inputs has had a dramatic effect on the profitability of not only the stud herd, but also the commercial herd.

**Breeding and calving season**
Meyer says they breed for quality and not quantity. They aim to breed fertile, well-adapted, hardy and uniform animals.

Heifers are artificially inseminated during June and July, and cows are mated from December to February when the nutritional value of veld is at its best. The calving season is from September to November. Calves weigh an average of 270kg when they are weaned at the age of six to seven months.

**Selection**
Bulls are selected at 22 months of age, which allows them to determine which bulls perform better on the veld. The bulls are subjected to a stringent selection process to ensure that only the best bulls are offered to prospective clients.

When buying breeding bulls, the emphasis is always on genetic potential, structural correctness and performance ability. “It is crucial to buy the right bull,” says Meyer, “and if we are unable to secure the perfect bull, we then use the semen from top bulls for artificial insemination. Substandard bulls will hamper your genetic progress.”

Heifers are selected shortly before breeding at 18 months of age. They look for functional efficient animals and take bloodlines into account. However, fertility always comes first. A heifer that has not conceived after her first mating season is culled.

**Droughtmasters sell themselves**
Meyer says the Droughtmaster Cattle Breeders’ Society provide a lot of support to market the breed, but the animals offered for sale tend to speak for themselves. “Bull buyers are very satisfied with the Droughtmaster bulls and their progeny. If the bulls are able to adapt to a producer’s farm, produce heavy weaner calves and there are no difficult births, he will consider the Droughtmaster again and again.” Based on their experience, Droughtmaster cows maintain their good condition, which reflects adaptability. Their calves are weaning 10 to 15% heavier when taken into a feedlot and these calves are market ready much sooner.

**Cattle for the veld and feedlot**
Adaptability and fertility are certainly some of the best qualities an animal can possess. They have been buying animals from all over the country since 2012 and each one, without exception, has adapted incredibly well to the Highveld’s extensive conditions.

This breed also performs exceptionally well in crossbreeding systems. According to Meyer, both purebred and crossbred animals produce excellent feedlot calves because they are so feed efficient. A calf that puts on weight quicker is slaughter ready sooner, thus reducing the time spent in the feedlot as well as the cost of feeding the animal.

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