



CLYNTON COLLETT

~ superior genetics ~

PROFITABLE LIVESTOCK FARMING

MY EXPERIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY

Article by: CLYNTON COLLETT
Published: CC SUPERIOR GENETICS WEBSITE
22 June 2005

WHAT MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF FARMING AND
STUD BREEDING HAS TAUGHT ME...



Copyright ©

CLYNTON COLLETT SUPERIOR GENETICS

– A Member of the COLLETT GROUP –

All rights reserved.

Published by COLLETT GROUP.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical or electronic, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Requests for permission or further information should be addressed to:

COLLETT GROUP

P.O. BOX 2213

FOURWAYS

2055

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA.



INTRODUCTION

After more than 30 Years of Farming and Livestock Stud Breeding, there are 2 questions I'm asked most frequently by my fellow Farmers. They are simply:

- 1. HOW DO I ENSURE MY LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY?**
- 2. HOW DO I MAXIMISE PROFITABILITY ON MY FARM?**

These are not easy questions and no simple answer suits all. Every Farmer's situation is unique, and therefore unique solutions are needed. However, through my years of experience I do believe there are a number of fundamental principles that are applicable to all Farmers. If these principles and guidelines are adhered to, the answers to these questions will be found so much easier.

MY EXPERIENCE HAS THOUGHT ME:

- Manage Nature optimally, i.e. make the most of what you have.
- Farm with a type of Animal that is in perfect harmony with your specific natural conditions.
- Research local and global trends and try to predict future markets.
- Use all available genetics at your disposal. This will help you breed a product that can effectively supply this global or local demand.
- Manage your finances effectively. You must manage with your head not your hart.

Easy on paper to follow, I'm sure you would agree. Consistently implementing them is the difficult part. Here are my experiences and practical advice...





FINANCES

Let's start with your Finances. New ground, vehicles, etc. should only be bought when the Farm is going through comparatively tough times.

For example, this practically means that when there is a drought and you still manage to balance your Finances and are able to budget for a new truck, there is very little that will ever threaten your future as a Farmer.

Farming is a highly volatile business, and thinking that, when the good times come they will be here to stay, is a very naïve and irresponsible attitude to have.

Good times should be used to save up and prepare for the inevitable bad times which lie ahead. And when they do arrive and you are still able to expand your business despite this, you know you are on solid ground.

SO MY BEST ADVICE TO ENSURE LONG TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND MOVE AHEAD:

Make sure that there is always more money flowing into your Farming than flowing out.

This may sound oversimplifying and plain common sense, but think about it and you will soon realize just how many Farmers have faltered by not adhering to this fundamental principle. Spending more in the good times than what your farming can afford in the bad times must surely be one of the primary reasons why many farming operations find themselves in financial crises.

I will say it again: "DO NOT SPEND MORE IN THE GOOD TIMES THAN WHAT YOUR BAD TIMES WILL BE ABLE TO AFFORD."

Farming is just too unpredictable to go about it any other way. Unlike a salaried individual who can raise his standard of living every time he gets a pay rise, a farmer should not raise his living standard every time he gets a couple inches of rain.



EXPERIENCE FROM NATURE AND HOW TO MANAGE IT OPTIMALLY

As a young Farmer I eagerly went about making lands, planting lucerne and onions and building kilometre upon kilometre of concrete irrigation furrows. For my Livestock Farming I studied many books on animal health and feeding and built Ram stalls with wooden floors and invested heavily in self feeders. Although my farming did move ahead, too many other, more important, aspects of my farming operations were stagnating. It is then that I decided that, first and foremost, I am a BUSINESSMAN and then a FARMER. This required a new mindset and a different way of thinking about my Farming.



I started striving after a new goal in which sentiment had no more place in my business plan. My aim was to firstly ensure that my farming operations were structured in such a way that I would be able to make it through the tough and difficult times.

Knowing that, if I could establish a business that can withstand the hard times, the good times would take care of itself.

To this end I started doing away with onions and other crops to which my particular soil type was not totally suited and of which the prices were also very unstable and unpredictable. Lucerne is now only planted on some 7 Ha of my very best soils, and all the other marginal lands have since been returned to natural grazing. Plants that are very well adapted to my environment, like prickly pears and aloes, have been planted on a large scale. This helps to prevent erosion and is also excellent feed for my Sheep and Cattle during times of drought and in harsh winter months. I therefore strongly recommend the planting of these types of drought resistant plants. Although they might seem worthless in the good times, they offer you a lifeline of fodder when the going get tough.

As drought is the biggest enemy of the Livestock Farmer in my region, as in most of South Africa, I also decided to make the preservation and distribution of water one of my top priorities. Large ground dams were built and pumping from the river which flows through my Farm was stopped. This



meant no more bore holes were pumped dry as there were no more large lands that needed this scarce resource. By means of ground walls I also diverted water out of the erosion courses and distributed it over the veldt. All the available water on the Farm could now be used solely for its natural purpose, which is ensuring that the best possible grazing is available for my Sheep and Cattle.



The effects were amazing! The water table has lifted significantly, new fountains have sprung up, and on large areas of my farm the whole ecosystem has changed.

My natural grazing now produces more food than what I had before with all my lands I had been irrigating.

The effects of drought are also less severe now thanks to the higher water table. I can now also run a 100 head of Cattle more than before due to the huge amount of reeds and other growth that has appeared in the dams and new permanent water courses that were not there before. On the same hectares I also run more Sheep thanks to the much improved carrying capacity of my natural veldt.

All this is a one time expense, but a continuous benefit. Farming in harmony with nature sure pays good dividends.

AND THEN MY NEXT BIG DECISION...

The next decision I made was to focus primarily on Sheep and Cattle breeding. And to maximise profitability, Breed sentiment and politics could have no influence on my decisions. All animals on my farm must be good users of the much improved natural grazing as all feeding has been stopped.



– PROFITABLE LIVESTOCK FARMING –

For the past 18 years, my animals have received only natural rock salt as a supplement, and NO OTHER FEEDING, irrespective of the time of year or drought conditions. Breeds of which the Rams still had to be fed for Sales and Show purposes have also all been sold more than 2 years ago.



Just like a maize Farmer has to study all new cultivars before planting to select the right one for his region that offers the best resistance against drought and disease and has the highest yield potential, so a Livestock farmer has to do exactly the same. Unfortunately, Livestock Farmers tend to become very sentimental about their specific Breeds and as a result they miss opportunities to use the wide variety of genes the various Breeds offer to their advantage.

Because of the fluctuation and uncertainties of the Wool market, and because Wool does not compete in the long run with meat production in our area as far as profitability is concerned, I decided to focus my attention primarily on meat and dual purpose Breeds.





RESEARCH LOCAL AND GLOBAL TRENDS TO PRODUCE A PRODUCT THAT SATISFIES THE MARKET

Another very important aspect of our success was to try and accurately predict Global Market Trends and position our Breeds to best service these markets. By keeping a constant eye on Global Trends in the Wool and Mutton market and such aspects as genetics and live animal exports, we were able to position our Breeds early on in the game.

The potential to export fat tailed Sheep to the large Middle Eastern Market made me introduce DAMARA SHEEP to my Farming. Our largest success in this regard was that we were eventually able to export our genetics to Australia from where Damaras could be bred in much larger numbers for export to the Middle East. As the numbers in Australia increased, so the further export potential of our genetics decreased. This, and the fact that the Damara carcass was never really accepted in the South African market, forced me to stop the breeding of pure Damaras in South Africa.

For another 2 Breeds on my farm, SA Mutton Merinos and Dorpers, the economics were also such that it made more sense to stop breeding them locally and rather build up these Studs in Australia in partnership with some Farmers there. The conditions in Australia were just better suited for these Breeds, and I also liked the idea of having a hedge against a potential weakening of the rand and local political situation.

As far my operations in South Africa were concerned, I became convinced that Sheep and Cattle Breeds on my Farm had to consist of a variety of genes from various Breeds of which I could choose the traits I needed that were best suited to my conditions to profitable produce what the market wanted.

A new Sheep Breed adapted for the harsh South African conditions and with very low maintenance costs was the answer I was looking for.

Type would play a very limited role in this new Breed, but breeding objectives had to be stringently adhered to. These objectives we were looking for included:

- A Sheep with hare and a light woolliness in winter that sheds clean in summer and thus never needs shearing, yet offers adequate protection in our harsh climate.
- Having a tail that does not hang lower than the hocks and does not require cutting. This prevents death due to infections and also less unnecessary stress is placed on the lamb.



– PROFITABLE LIVESTOCK FARMING –

- Good pigmentation for protection against our harsh sun.
- For easy care the Breed had to be polled and needed a good natural resistance against ticks and other diseases.
- A very strong herd instinct and no lambing problems were also high on the list of desirable characteristics.
- Furthermore the Sheep needed a functional conformation and had to be able to move about very efficiently.

The above objectives all serve to keep costs and risks as low as possible and have a total easy care and management Breed to Farm with in extensive conditions.

TO GAIN THE MAXIMUM INCOME TO COST RATIO, THE PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE OF THIS SHEEP WAS CRITICAL.

- Ewes must lamb at 12 Months and every year thereafter. No exceptions.
- Lambs had to be marketable between 3-6 months off their mothers. This would mean that more ewes could be run on the farm instead of weaned lambs which would significantly increase profitability.
- Carcasses of between 14 – 22 kg with no fat distribution problems had to be produced. The carcass conformation and quality also had to adhere to all market standards.

To ensure that all these requirements are continuously met, performance testing must be compulsory. The total amount of meat produced by a Ewe over her lifetime is measured and selection is done accordingly.

Out of this decision to lay down BREEDING PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES in stead of BREED STANDARDS the **MEATMASTER Sheep was developed**. Damaras, which have most of the required traits, except for muscling and fat distribution, were used as the maternal Breed. A variety of other Breeds, but mostly Dorpers, were used to improve Carcass Quality and Muscling.



The vision was to combine the good qualities of these Breeds and as far as possible get rid of the negatives.

The guaranteed future of the breed lies in the fact that it will remain an open herd book. This means that we are at any time willing to add new genes of any Breed that can *further improve* the Meatmaster without jeopardizing its current good characteristics. ***This is the vision for a Sheep that is fully adapted to its environment and consistently maximises profits as a result of utilizing all genes at its disposal to continuously adapt to changing markets and conditions.***

POLLED NGUNI CATTLE



Many of these same principles also apply to my Polled Nguni Cattle Stud. Why have all the problems of horned Cattle when excellent polled Ngunis are available? As much as possible of the Breed's good characteristics are kept through goal orientated selection, but market qualities are also strongly considered. Production is much more important than type, therefore to me the right Nguni is the one that calves early and calves every year and rears a Calf to a weight and a quality that suits the market.



AFRINO SHEEP



For the harsh southern Free State conditions I also decided to keep my Afrino's as a dual purpose Breed. This Breed, a composite developed by crossing Merinos, Blinkhaar Afrikaners and Mutton Merinos, has, after more than 30 Years of goal oriented selection, succeeded in capturing the unique characteristics of these Breeds. Comparisons amongst all the dual purpose Breeds with which I have farmed have shown that the Afrino, with it's adaptability to harsh conditions, good fertility, low Lamb mortality and ability to produce good meat and wool at comparatively low costs, made it a good choice for my region. Further more, in trials throughout the country where Afrinos were compared to other Breeds, they have always proved they are superior when it comes to dual purpose profitability.

SUPERTALER CATTLE



Only recently I have also started the breeding of Supertaler Stud Cattle by crossing my Polled Ngunis with Pustertalers. Having applied all the strategies shared in this article with you thus far convinced me of the fact that the Supertaler has what it takes to further increase the profitability of my Farming enterprise. I am excited by the prospect of producing quality meat off natural pasture which is chemical and hormone free.



TO SUM IT ALL UP THEN, YOU WILL SEE THAT I REALLY HAVE A VERY SIMPLE APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE AND PROFITABLE FARMING AND LIVESTOCK BREEDING...

- Use and manage your environment in such a way that allows nature to be all it can be.
- Farm with the right Breeds that are adapted and can perform because they are in perfect harmony with your natural environment and conditions and thus have the highest production at the least cost.
- Use all available genetics at your disposal to produce a product that satisfies the market.
- Implement a Financial policy that only allows you to incur large expenses in times of comparative difficulty. As I said, don't spend more in the good times than what your bad times will be able to afford.

So always remember, the good times are for gathering and saving, not for increased spending. Farming is cyclical and risky, but it's a lifestyle many can only dream of. So make sure you plan well during the good times so that you can continue enjoying this lifestyle even through the tough and difficult times.

And most importantly, I attribute all my success to hard work and the constant guidance and council of the Lord.

With all my best wishes for your continued success.

CLYNTON COLLETT

~ superior genetics ~

La Rochelle, South Africa.

Office/Fax: +27 (0) 51 654 0538

Mobile: +27 (0) 82 463 5936

Email: info@collettgroup.com

Web: www.collettgroup.com

Physical Address

La Rochelle
Bethulie
9992

Postal Address

PO Box 122
Bethulie
9992

This Article is subject to a disclaimer, available at: <http://clynton.collettgroup.com/disclaimer/>