

# Spotlight on Agriculture

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## INDIGENOUS ANIMALS FOR COMMUNAL FARMING? DOES IT MAKE SENSE?

Indigenous animals are in the lime light these days. Namibia's indigenous animals also attract great interest from the commercial sectors of several countries. The question is "why?" Is it just a money making craze or is it perhaps long hidden potential that is coming to the surface now. Why do the Nguni Breeders refer to the breed as the "Breed from the past for the future?" The answer centers on the words adaptability and drought tolerance which may in the end be very much the same thing. Indigenous animals has the ability to cope with the harsh conditions of forage scarcity, limited water and a dry hot, climate. Natural selection has trimmed these breeds down in size and conformation, lining it up with the environment. In the commercial sectors the environment can be manipulated to a large extent and one can get along with a bigger and less hardy animal. In the communal areas this is not possible.



**DAMARA SHEEP & SANGA CATTLE -From the past for the future.**

### HOW DIFFERENT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTS? CAN IT CAUSE THESE ANIMALS TO APPEAR INFERIOR?

<i>Communal</i>	<i>Commercial</i>
Animals are mostly kraaled at night. Grazing time is not more than 8 hours per day.	Livestock are free running. Graze until needs are satisfied at the most suitable time.
No mating seasons. Lactating mostly in the dry time of the year. Tremendous stress on both mother and young.	Reproduction is in the green time of the year. If not - supplementation possible. Very little stress on animals.
Reproduction at an uncontrolled young age. Enormous stress on the young lactating mother.	Age of first mating is controlled. Animals full grown with first lactation. Very little stress.
Very little to no inputs such as vaccination, additional feed and deworming/drenching.	These are considered basic practice in commercial farming.
Calves can only suckle in the afternoon when the cows return. The cows are also milked for household consumption. This dramatically reduces the milk, which is the only food for the calves in the early months.	Each calf has its mother available for 24 hours per day.
During winter the grazing around the water holes is poor and animals need to walk long distances ( 10 km and more is not exceptional) to get to the grazing.	In commercial areas animals seldom have to go beyond 2 km from the water because of the camp systems and the development of infrastructure.

**Table 1: Data from Sandveld Research Station concerning the Sanga cattle (1992-1996)**

	SANGA				LARGE FRAME			
Total Ha	686	689	692	697	694	684	687	687
Stocking rate kg/ha	15	25	35	45	15	25	35	45
Number of cows	25	42	60	78	18	28	40	52
Calving %	98.2	99.5	93.8	92.6	93.8	95.0	86.2	86.3
Weaning %	95.4	95.1	90.7	88.1	90.0	91.6	83.4	82.8
Total live weight produced at weaning (kg)	3780	5593	8073	10010	3539	5038	7686	9060
Total live weight produced at 18 months (kg)	6456	9950	14013	17220	5593	8052	12510	14730
Income (18 months) at N\$ 4.00/kg live weight	25824	39800	56052	68880	22372	32280	50040	58920

**Table 2: Research results at Omatjene Research Station (1985-1988)**

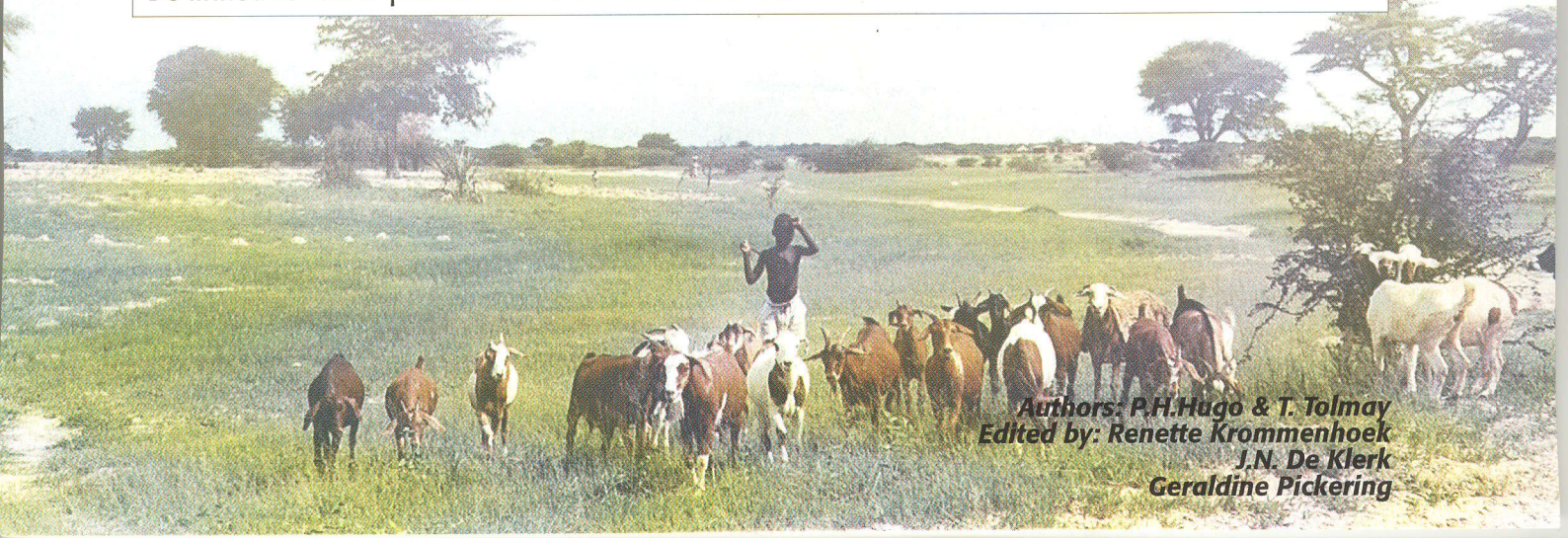
Breed	Live mass kg/ha	Calving %	Mortality at birth %	Mortality post calving %	Birth mass (kg)	Weaning mass (kg)	Weaning mass/ha (kg/ha)	Weaning mass per 100 kg cow mass	Lick intake g/day
Africaner	17.2	80.2	3.5	9.3	36.5	209.5	5.69	32.9	267.9
Hereford	17.1	87.4	8.3	7.8	38.6	211.7	5.98	35.1	252.5
Nguni	17.4	86.4	0	1.0	31.4	183.5	6.5	37.2	220.7
Sanga	17.3	92.1	0	4.8	30.3	184.5	6.43	37.2	227.9
Santa Gertrudes	16.5	84.6	4.8	8.5	38.1	244.2	5.55	33.9	349.5
Simmentaler	18.2	80.1	6.3	9.4	47.5	271.5	5.65	30.9	442.6

The above shows that more Sangas can be kept on the same area of land. The better calving percentage and lower mortalities lead to higher production despite the animals being smaller.

**Other research results:**

- Various carcass competitions in RSA and Namibia showed that the indigenous breeds' meat quality is exceptional. It should only be slaughtered (like the other breeds) when the animals are still young and in good condition.
- Milk production data is not readily available. Some authors however give figures of 6kg to an exceptionally 13,5 kg per day for indigenous cows.
- A study in RSA on tick infestation showed a loss of 29,5 kg per weaner for an exotic breed in comparison to 4,4 kg for the Nguni. This indicates a high natural resistance to ticks. Namibian experiences confirm this as well as a very high resistance to internal parasites.

The uninformed will very often refer to the indigenous as the "unimproved" breeds. Scientific data indicate that the indigenous can even sometimes outperform the so-called "improved breeds" in an optimum environment. The size of the indigenous animals should therefore not necessarily be linked to lower production and inferior animals.



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