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TIRISANO LIVESTOCK CATTLE BREEDERS AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE

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Background

Tirisano livestock breeders is a registered primary cooperative. The project was established through an initiative of the then Department of Land Affairs (DLA). The cooperative is located at the Kono farm which is in the south of Kuruman under John Taolo Gaetsewe district municipality. The land was given to the community to farm on as part of the restitution process.

Tirisano cooperative focuses on mixed breed of cattle. The project started in 2008 with ten (10) members and currently have only eight members, which comprises of four (4) women and four (4) men. When the project started in 2008, each member of the cooperative brought in two (2) cows, R200 as a joining fee and a membership contribution or R100 per month. This was to assist the members to kick start the project. The monthly contributions were used for transport and agricultural inputs such as feeds and mineral licks where cattle can go and lick essential mineral nutrients from a deposit of salts and other minerals. The project has an existing infrastructure of 1260 hectares to utilize for its farming activities. The carrying capacity of Kono farm is 12 hectares per livestock unit. By definition, carrying capacity is the number of Large Stock Units that can be accommodated.

Objectives

The overall objective of the cooperative is to improve the livelihoods of the beneficiaries through farming with pure breed Bonsmara cattle by utilising the restored land productively to become self-reliant and commercial farmers. The Bonsmara originates from South Africa and it is scientifically bred and strictly selected for economical production in extensive cattle grazing in sub-tropical climates. The specific objectives of the cooperatives are:

- ❖ To alleviate poverty among eight project beneficiaries through the livestock breeding projects on the restored Kono farm;
- ❖ To create employment opportunities through livestock productions; and
- ❖ To improve the business livestock, breed from unidentified breed to pure breed Bonsmara cows.

The cooperative targeted to sell 12-18 months' oxen to butcheries, abattoirs and auctions around Kuruman, Kathu and Vryburg areas. The females are kept to increase the stock to 140 Large Stock Units (LSU). The cooperative also sells heifers to other breeders and emerging farmers in the neighbouring farms. The main and primary product of this cooperative is rearing and selling heifers and steers.

METHODOLOGY

The cooperative sells the weaners at eight (8) months and the oxen between 12-18 months as they would have gained enough weight from grazing directly from the veld. Old cows are only sold when they have produced five to ten calves. Barren cows are sold immediately. The cooperative uses rotational grazing system to rest other part of the land to allow for re-growth of the grazing grasses. Since the land is divided into eight plots, the cooperative divides the pastures amongst these plots into sub-pastures, this allows them to better manage forage in a pasture, however, this is more labour intensive as compared to continuous grazing system.

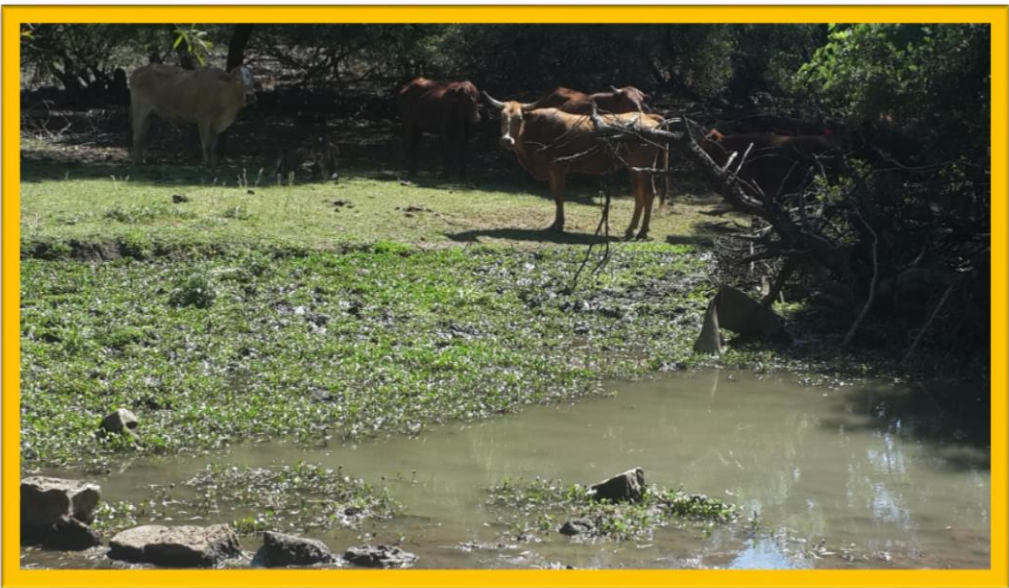
The cooperative uses a weaner system where cows are kept and calves are sold between six to nine months (6-9 months) of age. The replacement heifers are kept to maintain a stable cow herd depending on the grazing capacity which is available to sustain the cows during pregnancy and lactation period. The cooperative also uses Steers/Oxen beef production system. Beef production systems are classified according to the age at which animals emanating from a production unit are sold. In South Africa the most common beef production systems are weaner, long yearling (tolly) and two-year old (ox) systems. The bull calves are castrated and left on the grazing up to the age of between 12 and 20 months depending on the herd composition and the available grazing capacity to sustain both the cows and the steers/oxen. The cooperative replaces the mixed breed with purebred as they calf, this is still continuing and will be completely phased off over the years.

The cooperative maintains a stable breeding herd of sixty cows, five bulls and forty weaners or steers. This prevent overgrazing of the land. The cooperative uses 80% for calving rate, where 46 calves are born with 20% replacement rate and 12 heifers are then retained with 12 old cows sold every year. There is a replacement bull every three years.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ❖ Rotational grazing system is good for preserving grazing land but it requires lots of labour;
- ❖ Beef farming works well when it is combined with other agricultural enterprises such as grain, so that cattle can make efficient use of feed resources such as crop residues, or land that cannot produce crops other than grass;
- ❖ Farmers should consider their available resources, the land available, and level of interest and capabilities before deciding to engage in the cattle business;
- ❖ A good understanding of the different types of production system.
- ❖ Close proximity of water for the cows to drink is very important as cows get tired when they walk a long distance to access water.
- ❖ Establishing a breed is a long-term objective and there must be adequate land, water and fences to accommodate a year-round operation;
- ❖ Success of operations in cattle farming depends on adapting the strategy that fits your needs and capabilities; and
- ❖ Controlled breeding season is ideal, rather than allowing the bull to run with the cows continuously.







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