

BEEF CATTLE

Performance testing vital for improved productivity

It is vital that South Africa's emerging beef producers increase the productivity of their beef cattle herds. They are lagging far behind established commercial beef producers, according to Agricultural Research Council (ARC) researcher, Frans Jordaan.

Speaking at a beef cattle information day at the Glen Agricultural College, Jordaan said that the average beef cattle weaning percentage among emerging beef producers was approximately 40%, compared with 65% in the commercial sector. The pre-weaning mortality rate for emerging farmers' herds was on average 50%, while commercial farmers lost an average of 2% of calves before weaning.

Emerging beef farmers' weaners weighed an average of 150kg each, compared with 250kg for weaners in the commercial sector.

"We need to drastically improve productivity in the sector to ensure good profit margins. Performance testing based on good record-keeping is an important step in the right direction," Jordaan said.

There are between 13,5 million and 13,8 million cattle in total in South Africa. Should the performance of the herds owned by emerging beef producer be improved, it would have a marked effect on local meat production.

"However, proper performance testing and record-keeping are based on a fixed breeding season and these often pose a problem for communal farmers," said Jordaan.

Performance testing allowed producers to make informed decisions based on statistics gathered through proper record-keeping. Through its Intergis system, the ARC



ABOVE: It is crucial for emerging beef producers to introduce performance testing in their herds to improve productivity.
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had made it possible for all farmers to keep track of their herds' performance, according to Jordaan.

He encouraged emerging beef producers, in particular, to make use of the ARC's performance-testing service to improve long-term profitability. — Annelie Coleman