NICK SERFONTEIN

BONSMARA – top feedlot contender

The Bonsmara's excellent meat quality and exceptional slaughter percentage makes it ideal for feedlotting, says **Nick Serfontein** of the Sernick Group in Kroonstad. The group's feedlot has an annual throughput of 20 000 animals. **Annelie Coleman** reports.

Nick Serfontein sees Bonsmaras as the ideal choice for feedlotting because of their calm temperament, excellent meat quality, uniform average daily gain (ADG) and excellent feed conversion ratio (FCR).

"The breed's mild disposition means less stress, healthier animals and a lower mortality rate. Bonsmaras make up 55% of all bulls tested for ADG and FCR in the country, which means that a feedlot owner knows what he is getting."

Nick says the Bonsmara breeders' scientific approach and compulsory performance testing has identified and eliminated laminitis, hoof problems and bloat, major difficulties in feedlots. "Judged by its popularity with consumers, butcheries and restaurants, the breed is a good economic choice."

"The Bonsmara has a medium frame with ideal carcass weight and a good fat distribution popular with consumers," Nick explains.

"The breed's resistance to heat and cold is an advantage for growth and feed conversion."

ABOVE: The Sernick feedlot has a throughput of 20 000 animals per annum. PHOTOS COURTESY OF SERNICK GROUP

'A FEEDLOT OWNER KNOWS WHAT HE IS GETTING WITH BONSMARAS.'

SERNICK OPERATION

The Sernick value chain consists of a Bonsmara stud, a Phase C bull testing station, an animal feed processing plant (70 000t annual production), a feedlot (20 000 throughput per annum), abattoir (50 000 animals per annum), a de-boning plant, two butcheries in Kroonstad and one in Fourways. Planned developments include a sheep feedlot, and retail expansion with more butcheries. Nick and his team are also considering putting branded Bonsmara beef on the market.

ADG AND FEED CONVERSION RATE

Nick bought the Kroonstad abattoir in 1996 and built a 1 500-unit feedlot with the idea of branding the Bonsmara through franchised outlets in the Pretoria area. Unfortunately the project was unsuccessful and he went ahead with wholesale beef production. In 2011, the feedlot was expanded to 7 000 standing units.

"We select feedlot animals strictly on ADG and FCR. If producers can provide these figures, we are prepared to pay a premium of as much as R1 200 above the going price. We like to select animals with good temperaments. Highly strung cattle are difficult to handle and prone to health problems. Their growth rate is also slower than that of calmer animals."

MARKETING

Sernick animals are sourced from a feeder area within a radius of 150km to limit transport costs and adaptation problems. Sernick also takes other beef cattle breeds and cross-breeds in the feedlot. Animals are taken in throughout the year, but preferably from May to July when weaner prices are traditionally low. Weaners are backgrounded on winter veld until August, when they enter the feedlot for marketing in December when beef prices traditionally peak. Other peak periods are mid-March to mid-April for A-grades and October for C-grades. "All animals are marketed through

ABOVE: The animals are fed between 7am and 10am and again between 2pm and 5pm.

LEFT: The Sernick Group includes a Bonsmara stud, a Phase C bull testing station, an animal feed production facility, a feedlot, an abattoir, a de-boning plant and three butcheries.

RIGHT FROM TOP:

- The feedlot ration includes hominy chop, maize, cotton seed and Sernick feedlot concentrate.
- The Sernick Group plans to expand its retail base which currently runs to two butcheries in Kroonstad and one in Fourways.
- Quality meat, a highslaughtering percentage and exceptional feed conversion rates make the Bonsmara ideal for feedlotting.

ROELOF BEZUIDENHOUT

our abattoir with a small percentage going through our butcheries. We aim to market 50%, or 100 animals a day, through our butcheries in three years' time," says Nick.

He explains that doing this will create downstream benefits and reduce the abattoir's debtor book.

HIGH PERFORMERS

Bonsmaras are, on average, the top performers in the feedlot with a mean starting weight of 230kg and a final weight of 468kg. The ADG is 1,98kg. Average warm carcass weight is 285,5kg while cold carcass weight is 276,9kg. The average warm dress out percentage is 60,99% with a cold dress out percentage of 59,16%.

Weaners destined for the feedlot are backgrounded for roughly 60 days.

They are fed and watered and kept in paddocks overnight, to reduce stress. They are dehorned, marked, weighed and tagged. A vitamin supplement and a growth stimulant is administered, and animals are dewormed and inoculated against contagious diseases such as hepatitis, pulpy kidney and anthrax. After backgrounding, weaners enter the feedlot where they are weighed again and vitamin and growth stimulants are administered. They are also inoculated against botulism, red-gut and other contagious diseases.

Feedlot animals are fed twice a day between 7am and 10am and again between 2pm and 5pm.

FEEDLOTTING IN THE FUTURE

Asked how he sees the feedlot industry in 10 years, Nick says that the demand for beef will grow with population growth and the rise of the middle class.

He expects a greater demand for weaners. "South Africa will probably remain a net importer of beef. Medium and small feedlots will have to become more vertically integrated and branch out into de-boning, branding and retailing. Feeding the correct calf with known ADG and FCR genetics will become increasingly important. The cost of animal feed will play a significant role in the profitability of feedlotting and must be managed very carefully."

He predicts a number of challenges for feedlotting. "There will be continued pressure on consumer spending and the possible shortage of weaners will drive prices.

"Increased pressure from environmentalists, animal rights groups and the demand for free-range products could reduce the demand for feedlot beef in the higher LSM groupings.

"We should not negate the possible impact of strikes and other political action in the future, along with state intervention and new legislation to enforce BEE type participation in farming ventures. On a positive note, successful land reform could add to the availability of weaners."

- *Contact the Sernick Group on 056 631 0120 or info@sernick.co.za*

Feedlot animals are fed twice a day between 7am and 10am and again between 2pm and 5pm. The ration consists of:	
Chop	25%
Roughage	7,5%
Cotton seed	4,5%
Molasses	6,5%
Water	9,5%
Maize	26%
Sernick feedlot concentrate	21%