

By Johan Eysen



SandSonia Borans thrive on sourveld

Borans are hardy, authentic African cattle that are resistant against tick-borne diseases. They are by no means selective grazers and thrive on sourveld and fynbos. They are also able to recover quickly and put on fat following droughts.

These and other excellent qualities are some of the reasons why Johann and Corn van der Watt took over and built the SandSonia Boran stud in the Humansdorp district from their father, Corn Senior. They succeeded to such an extent that their stud now plays a major role in establishing the breed in all corners of the country.

From Africa for Africa

SandSonia utilises African cattle, the Boran, Nguni and Mashona, to breed veld cattle that are resistant against the severe regional tick population and that can be rounded off on grazing. These breeds offer top mother lines and offer the potential of exceptional fertility. The breeds have been ennobled over centuries and are completely unrelated, thus increasing heterosis.

SandSonia consists of approximately 700 cattle, 200 of which are purebred Borans and 100 purebred Ngunis. The rest are commercial Boran/Jersey and Nguni/Jersey crosses. The farm consists of approximately 830ha own and 80ha rented land situated in the districts of



SS12-48 (a third-generation Boran) is eight months pregnant and 29 months of age.



A SandSonia SP Boran heifer on white clover pastures.

Humansdorp and Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. The soil is mainly sandy Kouga sourveld (official carrying capacity 1LSU/7ha) with an annual rainfall of 600mm, comprising of 250ha permanent pastures and the remainder sourveld.

Selection for hardiness

"We select (in order of importance) for hardiness, longevity, fertility, milk, growth, conformation and temperament. Due to limited accurate performance data available for the breeds, and since modern performance data is aimed at weaner calf production for feedlots, SandSonia decided to resort to older methods. Selection is based on nature's principle of 'form follows function,'" says Corn.

According to him, SandSonia has defined an "ideal, functional efficient Boran" that meets their demands and that can be adjusted if necessary. They use up to 20 linear body measurements to measure each purebred Boran, followed by corrective mating.

"We were pleasantly surprised by the results of the process. It has assisted us in getting to know our cattle better.

Unfortunately these basic stockman skills are affected by modern breeding values and selection," Corn says.

The SandSonia seed for holistic farming was planted more than 20 years ago, when Corn Senior, amidst the rampant chemical fertiliser revolution, started producing his own organic compost. Over the next two decades, he gradually developed the farm. The process of carbon capitalising improved the soil structure and moisture retention ability to such an extent that SandSonia was able to double their carrying capacity over the last five years.

Corn's pioneering nature also led SandSonia to the Boran ten years ago. "The breed fits SandSonia's decision to take control of our future by embracing a holistic, sustainable approach. We are convinced that this approach offers a long-term solution for both the farmer and the feedlot," Corn says.

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