

UNIQUE

but part of a bigger world

by Japie van der Westhuizen, SA Stud Book

'NO MAN IS AN ISLAND'

**No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;...
...And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.**

(From: MEDITATION XVII, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, John Donne)

Although the context of Donne's very famous poem should be read against the backdrop of a time when the black plague swept through Europe (and the UK) and he fell victim to its effects, his very famous poem has been quoted in the context of reminding modern society that nothing happens in isolation and is inter dependent on many other factors.

This is also very true of any organisation keeping abreast with the latest scientific developments and in touch with products and services addressing industry needs. Individuality is important, but equally important are the local industry needs and uniqueness of markets, environmental constraints, resource availability and limitations not encountered elsewhere.

The South African beef cattle breeder cannot be divorced from the global context, however. Computing developments, especially ease of use, and access to information and products can often lead to situations where users of these products and sources of information become confused about their value and impact.

It is therefore also important to know if products used in animal breeding can be trusted. South African livestock breeders recording with SA Stud Book are in a position where they know that the recording practices, data handing, calculations of data that are presented as information to them and the genetic merit predictions to be used in selection and mating, comply to international norms and standards. The International Committee for Animal Recording (ICAR) renders a service whereby its members can benchmark themselves against global standards and therefore rate their quality of service delivery and products against these standards. Stud Book comply to all these standards for its services and products to South African beef breeders. One of the key principles of quality of data is to "rectify at source". This means that data submitted from farm level needs to be scrutinized for accuracy before acceptance to the Logix database.

It is usually measured against biological and logical norms (e.g. age at mating, possibility of a specific weight, etc.) as well as rules of the Breeders' Society (such as ownership, AI status, etc.).

Although these actions offer some level of certainty, it is not a fool proof assurance. This warrants further scrutiny at different levels, namely at calculation of other values (such as calving interval) and when breeding values are predicted (e.g. deviation from mean of contemporaries). Fictitious or wrong information or data, either through negligence or deliberate, lead to non-stability in breeding value prediction as BLUP will rectify these as progeny with records show its real breeding value with time.

The information of each breeder therefore has impact on all the others! No islands in cattle breeding and selection. Just like Stud Book, each beef cattle breeder, in this case Nguni breeder, should see him- or herself as part of a bigger picture. The advent of bigger probes into the genome of livestock will also contribute more towards expanding the view and usefulness of individual animals to contribute towards their production efficiency, and therefore competitiveness of the breed. A realisation of the links among each breeders' decisions and actions are therefore crucial. ■