



## Simmentaler – a dominant breed in South Africa

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### More than 100 years ago...

Namibia was the first country outside of Europe where Fleckvieh was successfully introduced in 1893 by the government of the former German Colony, in order to improve the milk and beef production of the indigenous cattle. The most important reasons for the rapidly increasing popularity of the breed in the first half of the previous century were its dual purpose characteristics. In the fifties 9,2 million pounds of butter and 367 300 pounds of cheese were made in average per year in the former South West Africa (today: Namibia). These dairy products were produced predominantly by Simmentaler and Simmentaler crosses.

In South Africa the first Simmentalers arrived in 1905 when President MT Steyn of the Republic of Free State established a stud on his farm Onze Rust, near Bloemfontein. The breed, however, held an inferior position until the early sixties, when the excellent performance of the Simmentaler was proven in official interbreed tests (Omatjenne). It soon became obvious that the demand for animals was exceeding the supply and between 1960 and 1970 large numbers of Simmentaler cattle were imported into South

Africa, initially from South West Germany and Austria. The number of animals that came from Switzerland and France, however was negligible. Since 1975 imports decreased considerably as a result of the development of a locally adapted Simmentaler breed.

### Simmentaler achievements in beef industry

As far as animal numbers are concerned, the Simmentaler breed is

the third largest of 32 non dairy breeds, surpassed only by the Bonsmara (local synthetic) and Brahman (Zebu). In comparison to the other 16 British and European non dairy breeds, Simmentaler have more female animals than the 2nd, 3rd and 4th largest breeds together. In 2009 registered female Simmentaler animals increased about almost 2,5 % while most other breeds decreased in numbers. Also a rise in numbers of breeders was noticed during the past year.



Fleckvieh milking cows on pasture in the Southern Cape region.



**Simmentaler beef herd (Hauk Erz daughters at Kykso Stud).**

**Simmentaler/Bonsmara cross cow with F2 Simmentaler twins.**

**Simsational performance**

How do Simmentaler perform compared to the other tested breeds? Data were collected from more than 2.500 female beef animals between 1993 and 1998 in South Africa. The results are convincing. They were:

- 1 st in reproduction index (1CP and age first calving)
- 1 st in weaning weight
- 1 st in yearling weight of heifers under 'farm conditions'
- 1 st in feedlot growth (ADG in bull growth tests intensive)

**Reasons for the popularity of the Simmentaler**

- The breed can be used with great success in crossbreeding programs for both: cows with high milk production and heavy weaners/oxen
- The number of bulls to choose from is enormous. There are more performance tested Simmentaler bulls than bulls of all other British/European beef breeds together
- The Simmentaler exceed the other breeds in a number of traits
- Comprehensive advice and other breed improvement services are offered to Simmentaler breeders
- Animals that do not pass strict inspections by breed experts, are permanently eliminated from the herdbook

The Breeders Society is very progressive with the application of new programs to serve the industry. Already in the mid-seventies the breed was the first to move away from the subjective way of judging only the type traits of an animal, by combining performance and appearance in the showing.

The Simmentaler society of South Africa is the only breeders association where judges are bound by the constitution to use production figures when placing cows. The well known Simdex system (SIMmentaler reproduction inDEX) that combines intercalving period, age at first calving, number of calves and even embryo flushings in one figure, was introduced in 1988. It was also the first breeders society that, after deregulation, established its own modern systems. The society is obliged to participate in the world's best beef cattle performance system. Services are provided by highly professional staff using the latest BREEDPLAN International software and a team of independent cattle experts who visit every breeder in South Africa and Namibia annually.

**New Genetic Indexes for Simmentaler and Simbra Breeders**

The Society has requested new indexes (Breed Object) for Simmentaler and Simbra. These indexes are in addition to the Feedlot index already published by the Society for Simmentaler since 2008. The three indexes are Feedlot, Grass Fed and Terminal Sire.

**Terminal Sire Index**

The terminal sires are being mated to moderate weight Bos Indicus / British type cows. Calves are weaned at 7 months (at around 250 kg) and fed extra rations for 120 days to be slaughtered at around 11 months and 430 kg steer live weight. Marbling is not important in the carcass.

**Feedlot Index**

The Feedlot index is aimed at a self replacing pure bred herd with emphasis on calving ease. Calves are weaned at 7 months (at around 250 kg) and then steers are fed extra rations for 120 days to be slaughtered at around 11 months and 430 kg steer live weight. Marbling is not important in the carcass.

**Grass Fed Index**

The Grass Fed index is aimed at a self replacing pure bred herd with emphasis on calving ease. Calves are weaned at 7 months and then finished off grass with little extra rations. Steers are slaughtered at around 11 months and 430 kg steer live weight. Marbling is not important in the carcass. The genetic correlation between the Grass Fed Index and the Feedlot Index is 83%, indicating that different animals may be selected using different indexes.

**Simmentaler took their place in the dairy industry**

Ten years ago the Simmentaler milk interest group was founded to promote Fleckvieh as a breed that



### Data collected in the Western Cape Study Group in the year 2009

Herds in group	Breed	Average Number cows per herd	Beef income	Milk income	TOTAL	Expenses	Margin	Margin after capital change
2	Jersey	326	285	12064	12349	7882	4482	4482
1	Fleckvieh	186	3248	6224	9472	4791	4682	6295
2	Beef (mixed)	69		0			1475	2280

is suitable for milk production. In 2000 only two studbreeders were milking their Simmentaler cows. Ten years later already 30 members of the Simmentaler Society are milking Simmentaler cows. According to numbers of cows, the breed is not only one of the largest beef breeds in Southern Africa, but also the 4th largest dairy breed, only surpassed by Holstein, Jersey and Ayrshire. Besides of the hundreds of registered Fleckvieh cows milked in the milking parlors across South Africa, there are also thousands of Fleckvieh crosses.

The Simmentaler Society opened a special herdbook for registration of all Fleckvieh crosses a few years ago. It became very popular to use Fleckvieh on dairy breeds to improve beef and milk income. Research done by Dr. Carel Muller, an agricultural scientist specialized in dairy cattle at the Institute for Animal Production Technology, Research and Development Services of the Department of Agriculture of the Western Cape, promised a bright future for Fleckvieh in cross-breeding programs because the breed improves health, fertility,

milk and beef production. The recent discovery of very high levels of Lanoleic Acid (CLA), the promising ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fatty acids in the milk of Fleckvieh and Fleckvieh crosses opened the door for an exciting future. Fleckvieh milk is not just milk but a health product. „Fleckvieh Milk“ along with „Naturally CLA and Omega 3 enriched“ are already registered as trademarks in South Africa.

#### Comparison of data collected in a farmers study group

The table shows the data collected in the Western Cape Study Group in the year 2009. The group was founded to compare the data of several farms in the same region. The figures are quite amazing considering the following:

- 2/3 of the Fleckvieh cows are actually still beef genetics
- 15 of the Fleckvieh cows raised calves until 3 months and were milked only the rest of the lactation

- Fleckvieh cows are grazed on a dryland pasture, the other dairy herds on irrigation pasture
- Fleckvieh cows walked 5,2 km to the pasture and back, makes 10,4 km per day for two months
- Fleckvieh cows received only 3 kg of concentrate per day, the other dairy cows 7 kg and more
- Actual feeding cost for dairy herds were R 6.064,00 against the feeding costs for the Fleckvieh herd of R 3.423,00

#### Cooperation

The Simmentaler Society of Southern Africa and the new company BAYERN-GENETIK Ltd. (former Bavarian Fleckvieh Genetics) share the same vision regarding our breed's future. Therefore intensive cooperation is planned for the benefits of the members on both continents.

The slogan of the Simmentaler Society „We feed the world!“ can be completed by the words „with high quality beef and milk“



Fleckvieh cows on the way to the milking parlour, a 5 km walk.



Ian Oosthuizen already has 1.000 Fleckvieh crosses on his farm.