



Livestock shows – *quo vadis?*

Cattle breeders and exhibitors are increasingly asking whether livestock shows are still relevant. **Dr Johan Kluyts**, president of the Simmentaler/Simbra Breeders' Society of Southern Africa writes about this contentious issue.

Livestock shows have been an integral part of animal breeding since the establishment of the first herd book. For some breeders it is a way of life and they will plan years ahead for a show. Other breeders deem it a waste of valuable time and money.

So what's happening in the current livestock show scenario and is it

However, with domestication and eventually through livestock shows, man started directly and indirectly influencing the factors that determine body conformation, performance and size.

This form of artificial selection should, however, not antagonise natural selection unduly and

'LIVESTOCK SHOWS CAN EVEN HELP DEVELOPING BREEDS ESTABLISH AN IDENTITY.'

still relevant in this age of modern technology?

Livestock judging through visual appraisal is most probably the oldest selection tool and still plays a very important role in animal improvement. Conformation was originally determined by natural selection.

remain relevant to the specific role of that breed in the livestock industry. Visual appraisal, and consequently livestock showing, still forms an integral part of livestock improvement, primarily because not all traits are objectively measurable. Judging should, however,

ABOVE: Vera Rumi CCE 06 2, Senior Champion Simmentaler Cow of Danie Erasmus with B Mokghatla at the Vryburg Show.

TOP RIGHT: Rivervalley Era AB 08 26, Senior Champion Simmentaler Bull, with A Moyo and PA Abrahamse.

ABOVE RIGHT: Leeupoort Karibu PN 09 99, Junior Champion Simmentaler Cow, with L Tanyane and Gert Nienaber. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRED DELL

retain a balance between visual appraisal and breeding values. Selection based on appearance alone is inefficient.

BREEDING VALUES

On the other hand, selection on breeding values alone can, due to correlated responses, create unexpected problems in correlated traits, especially in the absence of formal multi-trait breeding objectives. Judging can help to keep these correlated responses within acceptable limits.

Livestock shows help determine the best and most balanced combination between performance and appearance. Judging can

also help breeders and breed societies exploit their breed's strengths (characteristics) and identify and eliminate their weaknesses. It can therefore improve the genetic merit of the breed, enhance bull sales and boost the overall image of the breed.

Part of judging is also to identify those animals with a docile temperament suited to handling. This is important since most farmers do not have the time, workforce or facilities to handle anything but gentle animals.

One can never ignore the social, educational and promotional value of livestock shows. Here breeders get to interact with each other and with commercial cattlemen, sponsors, role players in the livestock industry and meat consumers.

The show ring is in theory an expression of industry demands and should provide examples



of the type of animal that breeders should strive for.

Judging stimulates a love for animals and develops stockmen with an eye and 'feel' for cattle. To judge animals is a special talent that we should nurture. Very few people still have direct contact with animals, and livestock shows provide an opportunity for them to experience animals first-hand.

Livestock shows can even help developing breeds establish an identity. According to certain scientists, a breed identity consists of features or 'fancy points' with no direct economic value. Although this may be true to a certain extent, this argument ignores the fact that breeders and buyers are not only stockmen, but also human. They are individualistic; they want recognisable animals, and are in stud breeding not only for the money, but also for their love of cattle. This desire has not changed since the early

days of domestication and breed formation.

THREATS

Since it is very expensive in terms of time and money to feed, prepare, train and finally show the animals, one can argue that there are better, more efficient and cheaper ways to achieve the abovementioned benefits of livestock shows.

A serious problem is that, for whatever reason, commercial cattlemen do not attend shows as regularly as previously. Towns people are also becoming more interested in other sectors at shows. This means that one might not reach the intended target audience and the whole exercise is in vain.

More serious, however, are the moral concerns. Animal liberation activists will convincingly argue that breeders exploit animals for their own purposes. They say "breeders transport these show animals in

TOP:
Prosim Study Group members at the show.

ABOVE FROM LEFT:

- Vera Rumi CCE 06 2, Grand Champion Simmentaler Cow, of Danie Erasmus with B Mlokghatla.

- Vooruitzicht Baldrik EE 09 29, Grand Champion Simmentaler Bull, of JH van Biljon.

- Judges A Wijd and Callie Lee.

RIGHT ABOVE:
Von-Adel Amheu, Reserve Junior Champion Simmentaler Bull, of Nico Venter at the 2012 Vryburg Show.



crowded conditions over long distances without proper feed and water and, furthermore, restrict the animal's freedom of movement before, and during the show. These animals are also fed grain-based diets that are not suited to ruminants and thereby cause a lot of distress and a number of diseases".

To succeed, livestock shows should satisfy a specific demand at a particular time and should adapt to do so. In short, a livestock show can only be relevant if it is also sustainable.

This means that it should achieve the intended genetic, educational and promotional goals in the most efficient way.

It should use human, animal and infrastructural resources efficiently and not pose an unnecessary risk to humans, animals or the environment.

It should be economically viable and, finally, should take moral concerns seriously to be socially acceptable.

– Annelie Coleman
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