

April, 2013



Dear Mashona Cattle Breeder and interested readers,

In this newsletter

- 1) Carmen Stubbs, 50 years as a Mashona Breeder
- 2) Advice on weaner cattle
- 3) Observations on the Mashona Breed. Dr Japie Jackson
- 4) Some questions answered

Carmen Stubbs Dr Japie Jackson gives us some background

I was transferred from Bulawayo to Fort Victoria (now Masvingo) in 1969. I was in Veterinary Department and that is when I first met Tony, Carmen's very charming husband. He was an important officer in the Ministry of Agriculture. Not long after that I had a veterinary call to Carmen's Mashona herd. That is where I first met her. I saw that she knew her cattle and that she knew what she was doing. I was of course very interested in her herd since I had a love for these cattle since my childhood and had my own herd (week-end farming) for about nine years by then. Later I left Fort Victoria and lost touch, and then heard that Tony and Carmen, cattle and all, had moved to Mashonaland. In the early 90s by the inspiration of Keith Harvey we formed the company "Indibreed," acquired land, by Government approval, in the Felixburg area, selected top breeding stock from the nine Mashona breeders involved, and launched our nucleus herd. Then I saw Carmen regularly at our meetings. What I will never forget is an inspection round with Malcolm Mackintosh. We inspected Carmen's herd, which was always very impressive. We then spent the night there and early the next morning her cook ground whole maize in a hand grinder for porridge for breakfast. That must have been one of the nicest plates of porridge I have ever tasted.

Mrs. Carmen Stubbs Notebook:

Calves – our calves represent the money we will earn from the cows we keep each year. It is vital to look after the calves.

Most important is that the calves receive colostrum from their mothers as soon as possible.

Colostrum is the most valuable nutrient – contains 2x more milk solids, 4x more protein, 60x more immunoglobulin, 20x more energy than ordinary milk.

Good intake of colostrum results in better growth rate.

The calf requires at least 10% of its body weight of colostrum before it is 10 hours old. It must be seen to suckle well.

Never milk a cow's colostrum except to give to its calf in an emergency.

If no colostrum - mix 1 litre full cream milk, 1 beaten egg, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 tablespoon cooking oil & heat to body temperature.

Look after your baby calves – so they grow strong.

SOME PRECIOUS GENES

Mashona cattle are susceptible to the common African diseases, and they do die. It is the degree of susceptibility, however, which determines viability. My whole veterinary career has revolved around ranch cattle. Several different breeds have been predominant, and occasions have arisen where valid interbreed comparisons could be made.

One of the first that was brought to my attention concerned Liver fluke. That was in the early 1960s, in the Featherstone district, on Philipsdale farm. The farmer showed me his CSC slaughter sheets. He had Mashonas, Aberdeen Angus, and their crosses. The ratio of clean livers, over the years, was about 4 to 1 in favour of the Mashonas.

I saw a Lumpy Skin Disease outbreak on a farm in Felixburg. This farm had a big Mashona herd and a small Sussex herd. The outbreak was practically confined to the Sussex and it was severe. When Heartwater advanced and made its appearance in Gutu, one farm with about 600 Mashonas and 100 Brahmans was struck. The incidence ratio proportionate to their numbers was about 10 to 1, the Brahmans being 10, and that is where the deaths occurred.

While I saw many cases of Red water and Gall sickness in the British breeds where these diseases were sometimes a major problem they were a rarity among Mashona cattle. I never saw a single case among my Mashonas in the forty years I was permitted to farm. Yet, during the Bush War, when dipping broke down in the tribal areas, thousands of tribal cattle are reported to have perished from these tick borne diseases.

Theileriosis is a disease which can cause nasty losses in a few weeks. The outbreaks I have dealt with mostly involved the other breeds. But in a few cases there were Mashonas involved, and some died. In one dairy herd which had a few Mashona crosses the incidence and survival rate was strongly in favour of the Mashonas.

I think these few examples will suffice for now to show that there are some precious genes out there. However, if this information causes any temptation to relax on the standard disease control measures then it has misfired.

By J.J.Jackson 19/04/2013.

AN UNFORGETTABLE MASHONA COW

By J.J.Jackson

Some twenty years ago I was doing PDs on Alko Ranch in the Nuanetsi district. The cows were coming through the race when I heard the workers comment and laugh when a certain cow arrived, and they called her "Shumba." This cow was a small red Mashona with horns. My curiosity got the better of me and I asked them why they called her Shumba.

They pointed out the already healing claw marks over her body, and said that she had got the better of a lion (Shumba). This lion, a male with a golden mane, had killed some cattle in the area and one steer on this ranch. The owner, Mr. Kloppers then shot the lion. He told me about it and I saw the mounted skin in his lounge.

But wait, the workers said concerning the cow: That is not all. No one dare come near when she has a small calf. One day she trapped the herdsman in the kraal. He lay prostrate in the deep layer of wet dung and shouted for help. His wife came running out of the nearby hut, picking up stones. She gave the cow a most thorough cursing, grabbed her husband by the foot and dragged him out of the kraal.

Colour in the Mashona's

No doubt the smoothest Mashonas are the black ones. Dun is a composite colour and usually has a denser coat. When yellow dominates the mixture of hairs we call the colour "Golden Dun," when white dominates we call it "Ivory Dun," and when grey dominates we call it "Daka Dun." That is the term the Mashona people use. It is the colour of ant-hill clay which they call daka.

Knock knees in newborn calves

Then we come to knock knees and bandy legs of newborn calves. I have seen these many times in my life but never as a problem. All the ligaments in the unborn animal have to be slack to ensure flexibility in the birth process. Then after birth they tighten up. They always seem to straighten out. I don't think it is genetic. I think it may be related to micro element deficiencies in the diet. It is not a structural abnormality, but only the ligaments that are slow to tighten up.

Finishing Mashona steers

There is absolutely nothing wrong with finished Mashona steers and the cost of feeding them need not be any greater per Kg gain than the other breeds if you feed them more slowly. In the standard feedlot they cannot grow fast enough and the excess food will simply go into fat expensively while they gain much less weight. But when it comes to veldt fattening they are the ideal candidates. Feed them on the grass for six or more months at a third to half the feedlot ration. You just want them to grow and they can grow considerably. If they get fat in the first few months you are feeding too much. You only want to push it up to fatten them towards the end. How nice it would be if you can show the country how one finishes Mashona cattle more cheaply than the standard feedlots.