Award-winning Namibian farmer Piet Coetzee has been highly successful in the country’s smallstock breeders industry. Acknowledging the role played by his wife, sons and workforce in his achievements, he explained to Annelie Coleman how he manages an eight-stud farming business.

For the past six years, Namibian farmer Piet Coetzee has been crowned the Namibian Smallstock Breeder of the Year. In his operation, the Piet Coetzee Farming business, he runs six smallstock and two beef cattle studs. The smallstock component consists of a pure Kaokoveld Damara sheep stud, a red Damara stud, a Van Rooy stud, a Veldmaster stud, a Boer Goat stud and a Kalahari Red goat stud – 1 200 breeding ewes in all.

The cattle component comprises a Charolais and a Charbray stud as well as an 80-strong commercial cattle herd. Piet, his wife Ogies, and their sons Zirk and Xico, also own the Namboer auction house. Together with his family, Piet has been farming on the 3 500ha farm Petrusberg, 170km south of Windhoek in the Rehoboth district, for 11 years.

“We believe in adding value at all possible levels in our farming business,” he says. “That’s why we decided on stud breeding. Our mission is to breed and provide the best possible quality genetic material to both the stud and commercial livestock breeders of Southern Africa. We decided on these breeds because of the demand for them.”

Petrusberg is, however, relatively small by Namibian standards, Piet explains, so it is essential to realise maximum income per hectare.

“Stud breeding means increased income. For instance, slaughtering cattle are sold for R8 000 each, while prices of R30 000 to R50 000 for a stud bull and R20 000 for a stud cow are not uncommon,” he explains. “Commercial smallstock earmarked for slaughter prices hover around R800 each while stud rams go for as high as between R10 000 and R70 000, and stud ewes for R7 500 on average. An added bonus is that top-quality and carefully selected stud animals’ progeny will continue to create wealth for the breeder.”
What was your biggest mistake?
"Choosing the wrong business partners. As a businessman, a farmer must be careful whom he takes advice from. He should only listen to the opinions of experts."

And your best decision?
"To actively involve my wife and sons in the business."

and the word berg (mountain), to create the farm’s name. He believes the ridge on the farm, or the “mountain” as he refers to it, to be the most beautiful in the world.

“Petrusberg is our piece of heaven on earth. We not only run a successful business here but it’s also a place where we come to recharge our batteries.”

GRAZING CAMPS
The sweetveld grazing on the hardeveld (hard veld) consists of, among others, silky bushman grass (Stipagrostis uniplumis) and small bushman grass (Stipagrostis obtusa). The woody component includes shepherd’s tree (Boscia albitrunca), wait-a-bit (Ziziphus mucronata) and camel thorn (Acacia erioloba).

Average annual rainfall is 250mm while the veld is interspersed with rocky outcrops and the typical Namibian dry river beds, locally known as omurambas. Water is supplied by six boreholes and four earth dams.

Petrusberg is divided into 25 camps, excluding an 800ha game camp. The camp sizes fluctuate between 90ha and 160ha, each with its own watering point. They are reached via a 50m passage and the camps are individually numbered.

Piet says the camp system is fundamental to his management programme. Approximately 30 breeding goats and 30 breeding sheep, each with a breeding ram, are kept in each camp.

CORRECT PAIRING
One of the most important breeding objectives on Petrusberg is correct pairing. The smaller breeding herds make it easier to decide which ewes and rams are suited to each other, and to determine the rams’ performance. The rams are kept with the ewes for the entire year. Ewes in lamb are...
FROM ABOVE:
• The farm Petrusberg is about 170km south of Windhoek in the Rehoboth district.
• Petrusberg is divided into 25 camps, excluding an 800ha game camp.
• The Red Damaras are bred for good muscling for optimum meat production.

LEFT:
Piet’s Van Rooy ram, Butcher. He uses White Dorper rams on Damara ewes, and the crossbred ewes are then paired with Van Rooy rams to produce Veldmaster sheep.

kept in the passage and returned to the camp two weeks after lambing. The feeding and water troughs are kept on the passage side of the camps for convenient control.

“A bonus is that the animals congregate around the troughs during the hottest part of the day, which makes it much easier to check them,” Piet explains.

“Ewes in lamb are then removed from the camps in time and sick animals are detected timeously. I’ve also designed the workers’ quarters so that they have to follow the passage to each other’s homes – the workers are constantly moving between the camps, even after hours,” he explains.

TOP GENETICS
The smallstock stud component has developed from a demand for top breeding material. Piet initially started with a Red Damara stud and then branched out. He follows a three-way cross system to breed Veldmaster sheep and uses White Dorper rams on Damara ewes, while the crossbred ewes are paired with Van Rooy rams to eventually produce Veldmaster sheep.

His studs excel in the show ring. Piet was crowned ‘Breeder of Champions’ for the Damara and Van Rooy sheep studs, and the Kalahari Red Goat stud at the 2014 Windhoek show, the first time in the history of the show that one breeder accomplished this. His cattle are also serious contenders in the show ring. The Charolais bull, Not for Sale 09 293 PP, was selected as the Supreme and Breed Champion Charolais Bull at this year’s show.

Piet and his family prefer quality to quantity and consequently run relatively small herds of about 200 breeding animals per hectare, which is essential to optimise meat production per hectare.

“The main aim of beef cattle breeding in Namibia is rapid turnover,” he explains. “We breed top-performing animals in order to produce heavy slaughter animals in the shortest period possible from the veld.

“The quality of the breeding bulls consequently plays a decisive role in the success or failure of a commercial beef cattle production system. That’s why we breed highly adaptable, hardy animals that don’t need to be fussed over.”
animals each to produce exceptional genetics.

“The secret to successful stud breeding is to provide proven genetics that add to the profitability of any farming concern,” he says. “We concentrate on achieving the best possible results in terms of each breed’s standards. Visual appearance and performance-testing must complement each other.”

He adds that visual appraising ranks high in his books, and rejects the idea of selecting on breeding values only.

“The client is king and stud breeders will be well-advised to breed genetics that the market requires. Otherwise stud breeding doesn’t make economic sense. The animals are bought to add value to the buyers’ herd and flocks, after all,” he says.

MANAGEMENT TEAM
Piet ascribes his success to the participation and support of his wife, sons and workforce. His seven workers are considered members of the management team and are consequently paid considerably more than legally required. Each worker is responsible for five camps. They manage a huge investment and must be remunerated accordingly, says Piet.

They receive two sheep or goats per month from the commercial smallstock herd for slaughter as well as an additional fee per animal weaned in the section an individual is responsible for. They also receive an additional fee for each animal prepared for shows and auctions.

They are eligible for an annual production bonus decided upon according to performance.

“We live in Windhoek. Although we work on the farm as often as possible, the workers are responsible for the day-to-day management. I value honesty, dedication and a meticulous work ethic, and manage my employees accordingly,” says Piet.

THE FUTURE
Piet is upbeat about the future of stud breeding in Namibia. “Namibia is an exporter of red meat and coupled with its exceptional animal health status, I foresee a bright future for the red meat industry. It’s our responsibility as breeders to provide the best possible genetics and in that way, ensure contribution to the sustainability and growth of the industry.”

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