



Namibian Simmentalers survive & thrive



Stephan Voigts, owner of the historic Voigtland Simmentaler herd in Namibia bases his breeding objectives on the commercial cattleman's requirements. The commercial sector determines the value of any cattle breed, and that is why the Simmentaler is doing so well in Namibia, he told **Annelie Coleman**.

On the high-lying central Namibian plateau, the farm Voigtland is 1 850m above sea level and only 35km east of Windhoek. The Voigtland Simmentaler stud was founded by Gustav Voigts in the late 19th century and is the oldest Simmentaler stud outside Europe.

The 7 500ha sweetveld farm, part of the highland savannah system, is divided into 46 camps. There are 13 watering points, fed through a 30km pipeline network by eight boreholes. With one of the driest climates in sub-Saharan Africa, Namibian farmers rely

heavily on groundwater. The average annual rainfall on Voigtland is 350mm but seasonal variations can shift from as low as 120mm to as high as 970mm.

Heidi Voigt managed the stud from 1974 to 1990 after her husband Henning died at a relatively young age. After reading commerce at university, Stephan joined his mother in the farming operation, which they ran as a team for five years before he took over in 1995.

In 1998 Stephan decided to focus on breeding, rather than run both a commercial and a stud herd. "This decision was not based on a desire to continue the family tradition but on economics. The breed's performance won't be easily surpassed

- FAST FACTS**
- Voigtland Simmentalers is the oldest Simmentaler stud outside Europe.
 - Current owner Stephan Voigts is the fourth generation Voigt to run the stud.
 - Voigtland Simmentalers excel in the commercial market.

in the extensive area where I farm.

"I need hardy, strong animals that thrive on the veld. Most of my clients are commercial cattlemen. They demand well-adapted animals that perform optimally on veld."

"Stud breeders often want to prescribe to commercial farmers, but we should rather identify our clients' needs and provide animals with economic value," he stresses.

GROWTH AND FERTILITY

As a breeder, Stephan is naturally keen to keep the fertility of his herd as high as possible. He selects for early maturing, fertile cows with good milk production to wean strong and healthy calves. "No meat without milk," he points out.

Bulls with positive EBVs for calving ease and rapid growth rate up to 400 days are favoured.

"Namibian cattle farmers rear oxen on the veld without supplements, marketing them at 24 to 30 months. They need veld-adapted, quick-growing animals. I aim to market



What has been your best decision?
"To focus on stud breeding. Combining stud breeding and commercial red meat production, you tend to use the best genetics. I offer my clients the best I have available and I do not cross-breed."

Any advice for prospective stud breeders?
"Start small, invest in the best genetics available, and apply good management practices. Ethical behaviour within the stud breeding industry is crucial, and stud breeders are expected to give honest guidance and to offer sound breeding material. There are no short cuts."

FW ASKS



ANNELIE COLEMAN

STEPHAN VOIGTS



bulls that meet the needs of commercial farmers and stud breeders. We produce what our clients want and maintain a high standard of excellence."

A recent analysis by the Simmentaler and Simbra Breeders' Association of Southern Africa showed the Voigtland herd to be genetically on target according to the breed's breeding objectives.

"Our Simdex (Simmentaler reproduction index) for fertility is rated among the top seven in Southern Africa," says Stephan.

Performance testing is a cornerstone of the management programme. Stephan selects specific animals to meet the customers' needs by combining Breedplan EBVs with visual assessment of maturity type, structural soundness and temperament. Backgrounding for 90 days before a sale, he markets

young bulls at 3 years, mainly at sales held in conjunction with the Lared Brahman Stud in May and September.

The Voigtland cattle are grazed rotationally on veld that is left for long rest periods. Every year, two to four camps are rested for the entire growing season.

Cattle are supplemented with a phosphate lick in summer and a protein lick in the dry period.

Heifers are put to the bull at 18 months for 45 days. Those that don't conceive are culled. Voigtland cows must wean a calf every year. The bulls run with the cows for 90 days during the summer and winter breeding seasons.

DAM LINES

A top performing cow herd forms the basis of any stud, says Stephan. Voigtland stud sires are selected from strong dam



Commercial cattlemen need veld-adapted bulls with top growth rates. Stephan selects bulls for calving ease and rapid growth up to 400 days.



lines to ensure continuity. "I used AI to introduce superior genetics into the herd as I could not afford expensive bulls. Now I only use AI on a small scale to breed new stud sires from selected dam lines."

A Pedro son was auctioned for R75 000 in 2011 and another was sold for R170 000 this year. Voigtland sires include Promatria Buschbrunn Tolhek, Nawina Els and Salerika Max.

'I USED AI TO INTRODUCE SUPERIOR GENETICS INTO THE HERD AS I COULD NOT AFFORD EXPENSIVE BULLS.'

The current Voigtland stud sire, Pedro GV, was bred in Stephan's AI programme. This bull has exceptional muscling and capacity, good hair quality and a strong walking ability. His calves that are small at birth but grow rapidly give good carcass weights with high value in the retail beef industry.

Nawina Els, a polled bull, is structurally very sound with outstanding depth and capacity. Promatria Buschbrunn Tolhek is a hardy medium-framed bull with an exceptional constitution.

Stephan bought Jacot Mocca in 2004 to breed replacement heifers. The

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ABOVE: Voigtland Simmentalers are genetically on target with a high fertility rate. PHOTOS: STEPHAN VOIGTS



◀ bull is long and well balanced with good depth and capacity and genetics for outstanding milk production. His daughters are mostly dark red with superior udders and small teats and his sons show good growth, excellent muscling and high libido.

“This bull is a trait leader in terms of 200-day, 400-day and 600-day weights and carcass weights, milk, scrotal circumference and eye muscle area,” Stephan explains.

A LEGACY OF HARDINESS

Stud founder, Gustav Voigts, chose the Simmentaler because of its strong resistance to disease. During the 1896 rinderpest outbreak in the country the Simmentaler proved to be the most resistant

of the imported breeds to the devastating disease.

The first Simmentalers were imported to Namibia as early as 1893. Arriving in Swakopmund after a long sea voyage, they had to swim ashore and then walk 80km from the coast across the Namib Desert to Otjimbingwe.

‘A BREED THAT MEETS THE DEMANDS OF COMMERCIAL CATTLEMEN IN NAMIBIA.’

There, they were shod for the journey to Windhoek or Okahandja. “It was clear that only animals with strong hooves and good walking

ABOVE:

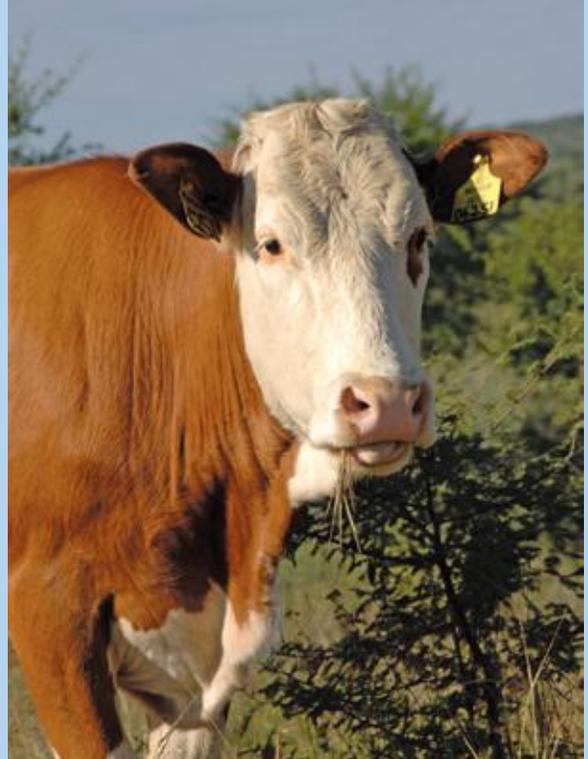
The farm is divided into 46 camps. Eight boreholes supply 13 watering points through a network of pipelines.

RIGHT:

The Voigtland Simmentaler cows are early maturing and fertile with good milk production to wean strong and healthy calves.

BELOW:

Voigtland stud’s founder Gustav Voigts bought the 7 500ha farm Voigtland in 1895. It is 35km east of Windhoek.



ability would survive in Namibia. Cattle had to walk long distances to reach water. Namibian Simmentalers developed into strong, hardy animals that thrive under the most taxing conditions.”

10-YEAR RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The Simmentaler made its mark in the Namibian beef industry after the results of a 10-year research programme at the Omatjenne research station near Otjiwarongo were published in 1951, says Stephan. The programme compared

10 breeds over a 10-year period, looking at traits such as fertility, adaptability, growth to the age of three years, carcass traits and profitability.

“The Simmentaler showed excellent results, which have enabled it to firmly establish itself as a breed that meets the demands of commercial cattlemen in Namibia. Its excellent milk and meat production makes it one of the preferred breeds in the country,” Stephan concludes.

• Contact Stephan Voigts on stephanv@rway.na or 00264 811 244 430 ■FW



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