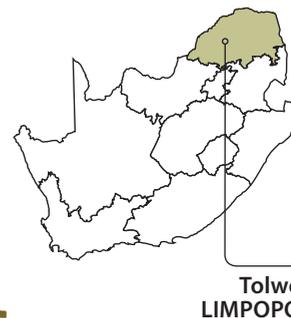


■ livestock

A young Charolais breeder holds his own



Having grown up in the Limpopo bushveld, **Nico Wagner** has the blood of a stockman coursing through his veins. This young farmer has already had two of his bulls represent the Charolais breed in the Vleissentraal-ARC Special Performance Test Class. In 2008, one of his cows received the *Farmer's Weekly*-ARC Best Elite Cow award. **Jasper Raats** reports.

WILNIC BOERDERY IN Limpopo's Tolwe district is the proud home of the 2008 *Farmer's Weekly*-ARC Best Elite Charolais Cow JPB 97 0007. The enterprise, on the farm Bulkop, owned by Nico Wagner and his father Willem, bought the cow bred by Johan Brandt of Delareyville in 2001. She was sired by Goodfault Ploughman and her dam was GH Haasbroek 94/102.

During her time in the Wilnic herd she has had eight bull calves and one heifer, all of which have been approved for registration. Nico, who runs the beef component of the farming operation, says they have retained one of her calves which is also one of their top bulls. All the

120 cows with 25 replacement heifers. The replacement rate in the female breeding herd is minimal as Nico explains the herd is still being expanded.

Most females in the two breeding herds, each consisting of around 40 females and a single bull, are first artificially inseminated with imported semen. In practice, this is 95% of the cows and all the heifers, while the others are left to conceive by natural service.

Looking at results

Wilnic Stud achieves a 95% calving rate for heifers and 85% for cows per 100 females mated. The summer breeding season for heifers is in December and January and in winter it's in July and August. The cows' summer breeding season is between January and March and in winter it's August and September.

The average age of first mating for heifers is 18 months and Nico says the herd's average intercalving period for the last three seasons was 470 days. The average calving weight for the last three seasons was 43kg for heifers and 45kg for bull calves, while the average weaning weight was 235kg for heifers and 250kg for bull calves. Nico says each cow delivers an average of 10 calves before being culled.

While he is probably one of the youngest farmers in the district, Nico has adopted

'The average age of first mating for heifers is 18 months.'

other calves have been sold except for one that contracted pneumonia and died.

Many of the other bull calves have been sold to other Charolais breeders and are currently doing service as herd sires.

In 2005, one of JPB 97 0007's bull calves represented the breed in the Vleissentraal-ARC Special Performance Test Class at the Pretoria Show. The Wilnic Charolais Stud comprises

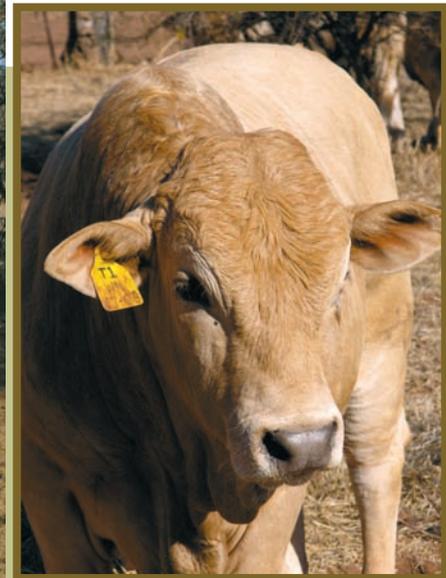
- Nico is building a Boran stud.
- Each cow calves about 10 times before being culled.
- Charolais, Bonsmara and Boran cross-animals make up the commercial herd.



ABOVE: Nico Wagner is still building his Charolais stud, but he has already proved his mettle as a man who knows his cattle. He has produced top animals with some notable achievements.

RIGHT: One of the Charolais breeding herds on the farm Bulkop.





ABOVE: One of the young bulls bred by Nico Wagner.

LEFT: Nico Wagner with his 2008 Farmer's Weekly-ARC Best Elite Charolais Cow JPB 970 007.

PHOTOS: JASPER RAATS

the trusted old record-keeping system of penning down all the details of each animal in a book from his now-retired father Willem.

'Borans are highly adaptable and produce excellent meat.'

Numbers are tattooed onto the ears of animals for both the stud and commercial herd on the farm. The commercial herd consists of around 150 Charolais, Bonsmara and Boran cross-animals are grazed extensively before being sold on auction.

"When prices are acceptable, we sometimes sell weaners to feedlots," explains Nico. He is also in the process of building up a Boran stud by artificially inseminating some of his Charolais females with bought-in semen from top Boran bulls.

He believes the popularity of the Boran will make it a viable breed in future as the cattle are highly adaptable and produce excellent meat.

At this stage, he keeps all his F1 Charolais-Boran heifers and inseminates them with Boran semen. The bull calves are proving very popular among commercial cattlemen

who prefer natural service. "After four generations I will have a pure Boran herd bred from a Charolais base," says Nico. "I'm very excited about this project and believe the breed will stand me in good stead."

He is confident that the diversity the two studs provide will enhance the profitability of the farming operation. Not that there is a lack of diversity on Bulkop where 170ha is planted to potatoes and onions and another 140ha to sugarcorn for feed.

• Contact Nico Wagner on 082 441 0643. |fw

About the area:

Located in the far north of Limpopo, the farm Bulkop has sweet bushveld grazing. While the area is predominantly flat bushveld plains, the farm derives its name from a hill showing a striking resemblance to a bull's head. There is no natural surface water and all the water on the

farm comes from boreholes. The average rainfall is 375mm per year. In summer Nico supplements his cattle's diet with phosphate licks and with protein licks in winter.

As he farms in an area where heartwater is the main cattle disease, he relies on antibiotics to treat sick animals.

1. Average ICP: average intercalving period.
2. Reproduction Index: an index based on age at first calving and average ICP for weaning weight.
3. Average Weaning Index: the average weaning weight index of calves.
4. Average Efficiency Index: average cow efficiency ratio (205-day weight/cow weight 0,75) index.
5. Birth Weight EBV: estimated breeding value for birth weight.
6. Weaning Weight EBV: estimated breeding value for weaning.
7. Dir: direct EBV (accuracy)
8. Mat: maternal EBV (accuracy)

Summary of the ARC Best-Producing Charolais Cow for 2008

Breed	Number of cows				Total % of Charolais cows participating in the scheme
	Elite	Superior	Excellent	Total	
Charolais	5	12	20	37	1,0

A summary of the 2008 Farmer's Weekly-ARC Best Elite Charolais Cow JPB 97 0007

Age years	No. of calves	Age 1st calving (months)	Average ICP ¹ (days)	Reproduction Index ²	Average Weaning Index ³	Average Efficiency Index ⁴	Birth Weight EBV (kg) ⁵		Weaning Weight EBV (kg) ⁶		BLUP analysis date
							Dir ⁷ _{Acc}	Mat ⁸ _{Acc}	Dir ⁷ _{Acc}	Mat ⁸ _{Acc}	
10	9	31,9	395	108	108	105	-0,70 ₈₅	0,71 ₈₄	11,60 ₈₁	5,20 ₈₂	2008/05