

## HORNS: YES OR NO?

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All illustrations of Nguni-type cattle in Egyptian tombs show cattle with horns. If natural selection over many centuries has occurred, "survival of the fittest", why are there so few natural polls?

The polled factor exists, apparently recessive dominant. Two polls will always breed polled progeny but horned cattle that carry the polled gene recessively can by chance breed a polled calf. Doesn't nature and the age-old association of cattle with their owners, show that cattle are supposed to have horns?

A prolapse of the prepuce frequently occurs in naturally polled bulls. Possibly there is a genetic correlation between the polled factor and a prolapse of the uterus in cows. Does it make any sense to breed a herd of polled cattle?

Fifteen years' observations of a herd of polled cows and a herd of horned cows made a few things very clear to me. There were proportionally more abortions amongst the polled cows. This can be ascribed to the way in which they jostle. The horned cows scrape or poke their opponents with their horns and the loser retreats. There is also a very clear pecking order in a horned herd, something which remains constant and over which they will not jostle every day. If they've been apart for a few months (e.g. mating season) they will sort out the pecking order soon after they get back together again, without any abortions occurring.

Polled cows jostle with much more aggression and force. They almost wrestle each other like bulls. If the stronger one gets a chance, she will put her head in her opponent's flank as hard as possible.

After two years in a new environment and 300 calving's later, the red jackals caught 5 out of 230 calves of dehorned cows and not one calf out of a herd of 70 horned cows. Since the horned and dehorned cows calved together in the same camp under similar circumstances, can one conclude that there is a difference in behaviour between the two groups? Maybe the jackals are a bit more weary of the horned cows.

In winter it appears as if the horned cows graze more readily under raisin bushes and other shrubs. It is as if their horns help keep the branches out of their eyes. Nobody knows for sure what roles an animal's horns play under extensive farming conditions.

The form and shape of an animal's horns is, just like skin and hair quality, one of the most prominent indicators of breed purity. Unfortunately many of our cattle are dehorned long before inspection.

The disadvantages of horns have been stressed many times but the environment in which you farm will ultimately dictate your discussion.

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