

Beef

A commercial beef herd of 150 suckler cows are Boran and Boran crosses, which are put to Red Poll bulls for production of beef or heifers that may be sold as cross-bred heifers for milk production. These crossbred animals under conditions prevailing in much of Kenya are very useful to smallholders, having hybrid vigour, increased disease resistance and heat tolerance. For the less developed areas with lower potential, they are ideal and are capable of producing substantial amounts of milk under relatively poor levels of management. The Boran dams crossed with either beef or dairy bulls are excellent mothers and produce beefy calves which grow well and the heifers are often good milkers. In our conditions the F1 cows often produce more milk than pure dairy breeds. Ranchers in drier areas of Kenya attest to the hardiness of Red Poll/Boran crosses citing performance equal to or better than pure Borans during periods of drought

In the Horn of Africa, Boran are kept by nomadic people to provide meat and milk. Although milk yields are low, the Boran cow has a very strong mothering instinct, there has been (unconscious?) selection for milk production and this may be the reason why Boran crossed with other breeds, both dairy and beef, produce good milkers in the F1 cross. It may also explain why the Boran cow is such a good dam, able to produce weaners well in excess of 50% of her own body weight.

Due to the poor grazing quality, we have difficulty fattening steers on grazing at a reasonable age. Weaner steers are brought into yards to grow and fatten and are zero grazed on sugar cane tops/grass, molasses, and a protein supplement. Manure from these is collected to produce biogas for cooking and generating electricity and the remaining slurry is spread on the crops. The heifers are grown out in paddocks more slowly. Whilst Red Poll heifers can be fed intensively, and be put to the bull at 16-18 months and then be productive for well over 10 years (the British Red Poll Society recently published a photo of a cow at 28 years old), we have found that Boran heifers fed like this will calve the first time early but then take a couple of years to produce the second calf. Borans fed intensively, show abnormal hoof growth and so can break down as they get older. Fattening for 3-6 months is however no problem as they will go off to be slaughtered. We therefore aim to bull our Boran heifers at 2 years and many ranchers have productive cows over 15 years of age.