

Red Poll

Red Polls were first brought to Kenya shortly after the Great War of 1914-18. They were used to upgrade the indigenous cattle which the early European Settlers to Kenya found here. Over the next 40 years many importations of new blood from UK and South Africa, mainly, were made, with many of the cattlemen of today remembering their fathers and grandfathers being breeders in the old days. Unfortunately, the old British breed breeds became unfashionable in the 1960s and 1970s with the industry leaning to more specialized animals and the continental breeds took over. These however, to attain their potential, require high levels of inputs which the older breeds such as the Red Poll do not. The Red Poll is a dual-purpose animal that produces excellent beef, winning many carcass competitions against other breeds, particularly in Australia. They are also capable of producing substantial quantities of milk and are known in Britain as the "beef breed with milk".

We bought our first Red Poll bull in 1999 from Lolldaiga Hills Ranch, who had been a breeder of Red Polls for over 50 years. Since then we bought 4 more bulls and 4 pedigree heifers from them. Sadly Lolldaiga have got rid of their Red Poll herd, so we remain the only stud breeder in Kenya. We now have 72 registered breeding cows and heifers. Some of our Red Polls are used as suckler cows but most are milked. The Red Polls produce an excellent cross animal with the Boran for beef production. They are heat tolerant and being medium framed and early maturing, we can finish them off in our conditions more easily than the bigger continental breeds. The Red Poll has good meat to bone ratio and is a good milker under adverse conditions.

Mazao Yetu Ltd, is now the only commercial breeder of Red Poll cattle left in East Africa. However, a number of smallholders have bought breeding stock from us. There is certainly interest out there and one farmer who bought 13 heifers from us in 2011, who has up to now been using Ayrshire semen on them, has expressed interest in obtaining Red Poll semen from us or elsewhere. Currently we are using semen from both UK and Australia and have used South African semen in the past.

Most smallholder farmers come to us wanting Hostein Friesian cows, with preconceived ideas of getting 40 kg. milk per day but in Western Kenya, we have found that with the low level of management skills and feed inputs, and the hot humid conditions, that the Red Poll perform as well as, or better, than the pure dairy breeds and so we recommend them to smallholders.

We have won the Champion Dual-purpose Cow at the last two Livestock Breeders Show and Sales in 2011 and 2013 and in 2013 also won the Champion Bull against Sahiwal, Fleckvieh and Brown Swiss animals.