



The Ankole bull that was sold at the auction for the South African Rand equivalent of sh175m in Mpumalanga, South Africa

S. AFRICA VICE PRESIDENT SELLS ANKOLE BULL FOR SH175M

BY VISION REPORTER

An Ankole bull belonging to South African deputy president, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa sold for R640,000 (sh174,611,820) at the Ntaba Nyoni auction, near Ermelo in Mpumalanga on Wednesday. The bull, the first of its kind in South Africa, had a right horn length of over 110cm and left horn length of more than 114cm; from tip to tip the horn length is over 129cm.

It was the highest-priced bull at the auction. Other cows which were popular with game farmers, who buy the bulls for hunting and use the horns as trophies, were hunting bulls which sold for between R15,000 (sh4,092,465) and R50,000 (sh13,641,548), depending on the size of their horns.

Most South Africans do not know the Ankole breed and marvel at their iconic, sweeping horns, in entire herds in Ramaphosa's farm near eManzana in Mpumalanga. The deputy president also owns a Boran and Bonsmara stud, farms game and runs a feed lot.

The eManzana area is mountainous with mainly sandy soils and coarse vegetation which only affords inferior grazing. According to Kobus Rall, an animal scientist and general manager of the farm, the area is a harsh environment in which to breed cattle. However, the Ankole cattle are not selective grazers. And, as the breed, they adapted quickly to the eManzana area.

"They are resilient during the drought. We simply provided a production lick, with 28% protein, as supplement," Rall says.

According to Rall, the eManzana area has a lot of ticks throughout the year. People in the area even joke that ticks originated from eManzana. Nevertheless, the Ankole cows are tick-resistant, more than other breeds as a result of natural selection in Uganda's similar harsh conditions.

"Where our Borans and Bonsmaras cows are dipped fortnightly, the Ankoles are dipped once every three weeks. This means animals

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are handled less and are thus less stressed. The farm has never lost an Ankole cattle to a tick-borne disease," Ramaphosa says.

As the Ankole cattle are stud animals, vaccination against anthrax, black quarter, botulism, brucellosis, lumpy skin disease and bovine viral diarrhoea is standard.

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"In Uganda, there is a big drive towards crossbreeding and some say that if crossbreeding continues at

this rate, the breed will disappear in 40 years. We do not simply want to increase numbers for the sake of it, but approach it scientifically and use fertility as a selection criterion," he says

Unfortunately, Ankole cows reach puberty late and heifers are put to the bull only at 30 months.

"We are trying to shorten that period through good management and correct feeding practices," Rall said.

The oldest cow in the herd was born in 2006 and is still in production, an indication of the Ankole cattle longevity. Bulls weigh 500kg to 700kg and cows between 400kg and 500kg.

According to Ramaphosa, at the first-ever sale of the Ankole cows in Ermelo earlier this year, interest in the Ankoles came mostly from game breeders, who valued the horn sizes and structure. The breed is also attractive for the ecotourism industry because it can coexist and roam together with wildlife.

Ramaphosa said: "The Ankole cow is significantly a good beef product. It appeals to beef producers. The pure breeds are low in cholesterol, and can even cross-breed with others for attributes such as disease resistance."

HOW ANKOLE COWS GOT TO SOUTH AFRICA

Ramaphosa is also a businessman, activist and trade union leader. He has served as the deputy president under president Jacob Zuma since 2014. Ramaphosa first became interested in Ankole cattle in 2004 when he visited President Yoweri Museveni. The President offered to sell him the cows, but the South Africa Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries prevented the importation, citing inadequate disease control measures in Uganda. Determined to solve the problem, Ramaphosa enlisted the assistance of Dr Morné de la Rey, a vet and director of Embryo Plus, who has been extensively involved in embryo

transfer, especially in Boran cattle. He then bought 43 Ankole cattle from Museveni and shipped them to Ol Pejeta in Kenya, where Embryo Plus runs an embryo quarantine station. The cows were artificially inseminated and the embryos flushed after seven days and sent to South Africa. Here they were transferred to cows, which were then quarantined for two months. Today, there are approximately 100 Ankole breeding cows on Ramaphosa's farm in Ntaba Nyoni.

"I fell in love with the Ankole breed and I believe it can offer many advantages for the South African market," he told journalists at the auction.