

Zululand cattleman adds value with feedlot

The often hot and humid Zululand area may appear lush and bountiful to the uninitiated, but it can be a challenging environment in which to be a commercial beef farmer. One such producer, **PJ Hassard**, explains how he balances natural with supplied nutrition to get the best from his oxen. **Lloyd Phillips** reports.



FAST FACTS

Over decades of beef production, PJ Hassard has found that crossbreeding the Brahman and Simmentaler breeds works best for his enterprise.

Silvasands Farm retains, backgrounds and feedlots up to 150 oxen a year that are then marketed via various channels to achieve the highest prices possible.

Hassard feeds his oxen on Zululand's natural veld for three months before sending them to the on-farm feedlot; this helps reduce his beef production costs significantly.

ABOVE: Depending on the quality of Silvasands Farm's natural veld at a particular time of year, PJ Hassard supplements his oxen's grazing with appropriate licks containing the required vitamins and minerals.
PHOTOS: PJ HASSARD

Not far north-east of Hluhluwe, in KwaZulu-Natal's (KZN) Zululand area, is an expansive and diversified farming business that has been in the Maré and Hassard families since 1919. The local climate is classified as subtropical, but visitors during February – when daytime temperatures can reach over 40°C, the humidity level is high, and thunderstorms are frequent – could be forgiven for believing the climate is tropical.

However, the Silvasands Farm property, as named by the Hassard family, gets a reprieve in late autumn, winter and early spring when average daytime temperatures can drop to the high teens, and rainfall is generally at its lowest for the year. More commonly during this time, the days are sunny and comfortably warm, and the local natural vegetation retains some of its green colour, unlike parts of South Africa where winter's frequent early-

morning frosts chill the grasses and other susceptible plants to shades of golden-brown.

Since 1993, Peter-John 'PJ' Hassard has been involved full-time in running the family's agribusiness alongside his father, Peter. He has diligently developed a hardy Brahman x Simmentaler commercial beef herd that is now well known and respected in the province's red meat sector. Hassard has also earned the respect of his fellow farmers, as evidenced by his election to his current positions of vice-chairperson of the KZN Red Meat Producers' Organisation and president of the KZN Agricultural Union.

"Before the big drought of 2015 and 2016, I was running about 1 200 breeding cows," he says. "The drought was so bad that I had to reduce my cow herd to 850 head. Since the drought ended in the summer of 2016/2017, I've been gradually rebuilding the herd. My breeding cows now number around 1 000 and continue to increase."