

# FARMING SA

JUNE 2008

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# 019

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# RATSHIKANA

## in line for SA's Cattle Farmer of the Year

The life of Benjamin Ratshikana, a lawyer who remained a village boy at heart, was changed forever by the influence and guidance of commercial farmers. He is regarded as one of the three best South African cattle farmers of 2008.



## By COIS HARMAN

**and inspired me to develop a love for farming.** During October 1999 my path crossed those of two commercial farmers, At Niemand of Schweizer Reneke and Boetie Viljoen of Leeudoringstad. They inspired me and taught me about cattle farming in general. But when I saw their farms, I said to myself that I couldn't start farming cattle if I didn't even have a farm. At that stage it was just as difficult to buy a farm as it is today; agricultural land was very expensive. Then I met Daniël Hlongwane, who farms near Rustenburg. He encouraged me to go for the farming option. I ultimately managed to make a start in the communal area of Tlapeng village close to Mafikeng.

**The communal set-up posed many problems and nearly drove me to abandoning farming.** Luckily, I carried on. I became the caretaker of a farm at Golga in about 2001 and I started to see farming in a different light. I bought almost every cow that came my way and took them to the farm. I learned a lot during this phase and discovered that I was not making enough impact.

**I met a Brahman cattle breeder who was willing to share his knowledge and experience with me.** His name was Gawie Coetzee and he was from the Lichtenburg area in North West province. I learned a lot from him. He emphasised the importance of breeding with registered animals. When I discovered there were only a few black stud breeders in the Brahman Breeders' Association I became discouraged, but decided to give it a go all the same.

**I joined the Brahman Breeders' Association in 2003.** That was after I had bought my first cow from Gawie Coetzee at the Brahman Club auction in Lichtenburg. I got a very special feeling when I looked at that cow on my farm. I visited Ponki Makinita, a well-known Brahman and

Braunvieh breeder in the Marico Bushveld. He encouraged me and helped me to move faster towards establishing my stud. I salute that man for his humility and his knowledge of cattle and farming. What an inspiration!

**The Brahman Braunvieh crossbreeds I bought at auctions in 2002 put more money in my pocket.** This was because they were heavier than other calves of the same age and they performed and adjusted better, compared to other cattle from the same area. I bought these crossbreeds from a commercial farmer, Boetie Viljoen. During the 2006 Vryburg Show, I attended a training session held by the Braunvieh Breeders' Association. What I learned there moved me to start a Brahman-Braunvieh crossbreeding programme, because I knew what had previously worked for me. Subsequently I started weaning calves able to pull their weight at auctions. I also bought Braunvieh stud cattle from Pat Wethmar, Baboo Rajan and Ponki Makinita.

**Last year I registered as a member of the Braunvieh Breeders' Association.** As time went by I became a regular exhibitor showing off my stud Braunvieh and Brahman cattle at the annual Lichtenburg Show during mid-April. This year I received the nomination for Cattle Farmer of the Year at a ceremony arranged by Breedplan.

**I challenge all farmers to join hands and help one another.** Farmers should share their knowledge and experience. They should guide passionate developing farmers towards becoming successful commercial farmers who can produce quality products to feed and clothe the nations of southern Africa. 🌐

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**A developing farmer who knows what he wants and works hard to reach his goals, will succeed and become fully commercial.** I started farming in 1999 and managed to become fully commercial in a few years. I can only recommend that fellow cattle farmers buy quality bulls to improve their herds. My passion for quality cattle grows day by day.

**As a youngster I had not been exposed to any farming activities.** I was born and raised in the village of Dinokana in the Lehurutshe district of South Africa's North West province where I attended school. I qualified as a lawyer – a profession I still follow.

**Many people influenced me**