

## Un ranch au coeur de la RDC; le pari fou de GoCongo

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## **GoCongo ;**

**20 january-14 february 2025**

### **1) Intro**

This trip was about to check on PHL's cattle management during the reproduction season. Every herds were checked. Cows, heifers and growing animals were sorted regarding the potential they had ( early reproduction, walking to Malambwe, killed as second choices, and more).

A list of recommendation was made to try to improve the success of this bulling season, but also to guarantee the animals' health throughout the ranch.

Find here the operations that I have done with the crew.

### **2) Kraal hospital's management**

I went through a few « kraal hospital » and realised that most of them contained between 55-75 animals each. Not all of the animals required daily health care, due to the fact that most of them were recovering very well and others were already fully recovered for a long time. Only a few were in need of constant treatment.

Big bulls were staying in as they got lost from their original herd due to a lack of survey from the workers. In fact, some bulls try to walk away sometimes if no females are in heat in their herd, to look after others, in different herds.

The vets were told to sort their herd out, so that the sick animals are not bothered by others, and that the vet's focus remains only on sick animals.

Bulls were send back and recovered calves and cows got back to their original herd.

The vets were told that 6.30 am is the hour to start the day and not 8. The fact that they consider themselves as « health expert » doesn't allow them to sleep more than simple workers. A few reminders had to be done for some of them.

Some animals were selected and a list was made for Mr. Tawanda from FrigoCongo to sell them in Kamina, I'm sure they would never recover.

The lack of knowledge and skills is sometimes frightening. I set up different protocols for ear infections and fractures. They were using the wrong antibiotics, sometimes for no reason.

I still believe that a simple book, gathering all the main diseases and problems they are facing, written with simple words, and with a couple of explanations for each, as, the main symptoms, the groupe of animals more likely to face this disease and a simple treatment protocole would save a lot of animals from dying because of an unaproprate medical care.

I already made these suggestions in july and november, but none of the directors or head of section respected it.



### **3) Young cows at Kelambwe (Kraal 5, herd 1 and 2)**

I realised that the first calvers were extremely thin and in a bad health. Their calves were not thriving as well as regular calves.

After a close look at the field that was available for them, I realised that the section head made a mistake concerning the burning program, and that fresh grass wasn't available for them. They weren't eating enough to me.

I asked to inject the weaker calves with vitamins and dewormer, and to move the herd to a better pasture. They will leave their pasture on Monday 27/01 to join a better one in Kraal 9. I asked to lead them to the water point 3 times a day rather than 2, and to add salt and minerals nearby to try to increase their food and water intake.

A selective deworming program was also taught to the herds' responsables, due to the various ages of the calves. In fact, some were already in need of it, where others were just born. They thought they had to wait and treat all the calves in a few months.

I went through these herds later this month to check on them, and see if the suggestions I made were respected. We could already see a positive response to those changes. The cows were quiet and their belly full !

### **4) Abortions**

15 cows had aborted in Kraal 12, this all happened in a short period of time. The abortions' management is terrible.

They would let the cow abort in the middle of the herd and keep it there until she releases its placenta ( a few days later). The abortion was given to the dogs as a meal.

My advice was to burn the abortion as soon as possible, with the placenta. The day that the cow aborts, she would be directly sent to the Kraal hospital, to prevent other cows to get infected by the bacteria or viruses carried by the abortion fluids, placenta and abortion. After a few days of treatment (if required), the cow would be sent to the nearest fattening section. In fact, you don't want this animal to get close other reproducers. It would be then sent on trecks, with other culled animals.

We might have to start a vaccination program regarding Brucellosis in these herds, before the end of the dry season, in August.

### **5) Reproduction heifers**

I went through the late 2022 heifers' herd and realised that some were heaving already, and might reach 280kg. The initial plan was to put them with bull at 3 years of age, in July/August/September in this case. But because we are setting a reproduction period and that we don't want to lose an extra year, I wanted to select some to meet the bull earlier in their career.

The heifers were weighed and the ones weighing more than 280kg were sent to a reproduction section.

Getting smaller heifers in calf now doesn't scare me too much because this means they would calve at the start of the rainy season and be weaned before the end, so the nutrition will be ideal.

This was done in all PHL's section, adding another 1000 heifers to the reproduction herds.

### **6) First and second choices**

We have a lot of « second choice » culled animals here on the ranch. Slaughterhouses and sales were organised this week for customers from Kamina. « First choice » animals were sold.

Why can't we ban selling animals able to go on tracks (first choice) and only sell second choice animals on the ranch? In fact, there is a lack of animal at the feedlot, and too much « second choice animals » in each Kraal hospital. I understand that the police and the army need to be served well, but for the rest, I wouldn't allow « first choice » sales on the ranches.

### **7) Drinking time**

I asked the herders to make their cattle drink in the early morning, at noon, and just before they lock them up for the night.

Before, they would lead them to the water point at 10 am, and 15pm. The cattle were not drinking enough and as a consequence, eat less.

We could already see, after a couple of days, that their food intake was higher, simply by looking at the shape of their belly !

### **8) Weaning**

A new weaning protocol was set on the ranch.

Now, weaners are going to spend 3 days in a pen, but with food and water. The only branding that will remain, is the year and trimester of birth. The individual number and the letter of their section won't be branded anymore. This will reduce their pain and stress during the weaning period, aiming for a better growth rate straight away.

Calves are going to be weaned up to 7 months rather than 9 like it used to be). This was made to let the cows rest and thrive a little bit during the end of the rainy season, because most of them were too thin. This will hopefully get them in a better condition by the end of the rainy season and get them on heat if not already pregnant.

Another experimental scheme will take place at Tshiongwé, where the weaners will graze during the day as usual, but won't be locked at night. In fact, mobile barriers were built to provide them a new fresh grazing area every night. So basically, they will be on a rotational grazing program during the night.

This protocol's effectiveness will be tested during the dry season. I expect those calves to be at least 40kg heavier than the previous batch of weaners.



### **9) Bulls in the herds**

I still don't understand why, but the bulls were still together to this date, with only a small amount was put in cow's herds.

I added bulls in nearly every PHL's herds. Now the bull and cow ratio is about 1/20 maximum, while it was 1/100 last months, and bulls couldn't handle all the heating cows.

I believe the reproduction season must continue to the 15 april at least, to correct these management mistakes.

### **10) Field's management**

A lot of herds were overgrazing their pastures, the animals being thin at this time of the year is a good indicator. Section's Head were told to remove those herds from their pasture to another one, with more fresh grass.

A lot of teaching and survey must be done that side, they often use their « traditions » as an excuse.

### **11) Next important investment**

We should ban holding pens. The cattle spend too much time in such an area with no food, no water, no room to rest and a lot of manure, especially at this time of the year.

To me, this is responsible for the majority of their health problems and their lack of performance.

A simple way of replacing those holding pens, is building them a different paddock every night. The paddock would have to be large enough to let every animal rest and even eat a little if they want to.



1 Ha paddocks would be enough. This means 100 x 100m, so a 400m electric wire roll and 50 mobile posts. The bouviers would have to move it every day, providing a clean and wide bed for evrey cattle daily ( it takes less than an hour to set this up, I do it during the winter for my sheep).



## **12) Grelka 's managment**

Batsie is too confortable as it is now. I believe that spliting Grelka in 2, and having a second manager on the ranch would put a bit of pressure on him and positive competition would rise. I think he could perform a lot better than what he is doing right now.

He is definetly considered by the section heads and the workers as a big boss and he leads them properly, but on the cattle side, not much improvement were noticed as expected.

## **13) Reproduction season, AI**

1382 cows have been scanned during my stay. The others couldn't make it to the holding facilities due to bad planning by the managers.

39% were certified incalf, and these scannings took place on the 5, 6 and 7th of Febuary.

Important explanations have to be made regarding those results.

- a) None of them were selected or sorted before. This means that I also scanned cows who weren't inseminated.
- b) Pregnancies can only be certified with the scanner around 30 days after the insemination/mating. They stopped the AI program on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, which means that some cows inseminated between the 5 and the 15<sup>th</sup> of February were considered non pregnant regarding the scanning but could be pregnant anyway.
- c) The herds were not sorted properly before the season by the managers. In fact, some cows gave birth during the bulling season and others are still due to calve in the next couple of weeks. This means that the total of « 2000 cows » destined to be inseminated, was actually lower than that, because all the pregnant cows and fresh calvers could not fit in this AI program.
- d) I want to wait on Batsiray's answer which I didn't get for now, which is the lists of inseminated cows, scanning results and birth recordings to be able to conclude on this AI program. As for now the results are a bit disappointing, considering the fact that I made suggestions in November regarding some aspects of the logistics that were not respected. The alcohol and the lack of obsession for good results for some of the people involved might also interfere with those poor numbers.

#### **14) Hierarchy**

Up until now, section heads have always been chosen regarding their college degree. They never worked or achieved anything and are given the best role and salary, whereas the workers can only get a promotion to become « generals ». The truth is that section heads know nothing about cattle in general and are not able to deal with them. Most of them don't deserve their status.

Opening the « section head position » to the workers would allow them to dream bigger and to work better. It would also lead to having section heads who know what needs to be done and are useful. Obviously, some minimal education skills as the ability to write and read is necessary and will be required, but some workers deserve promotions and some section heads need to go on permanent leave !

#### **15) TB**

I wasn't able to start the tuberculin program because the facilities that were needed for cattle's sorting weren't ready.

It could be done in the dry season, with the isolation of the TB free animals in the northern section (Tshiongwé and Mushindji), where the rest of PHL's herd could head to the feedlot.

This would also solve your feedlot supply problem. 15 000 animals would be available in one or two years. They could be replaced by incalf heifer that you buy from other herds ( free from any diseases).