



## Buying and selling livestock at auctions – do's and don'ts

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Livestock auctions are a part and parcel of the South African livestock industry. They serve a vital role in helping livestock farmers to buy and sell animals and to get to know others in the same industry. Auctions are especially important for the emerging farmer with a small number of animals to trade who doesn't necessarily have the marketing power of big commercial farmers.

Livestock auctions take place on a regular basis at designated sites. They are run by professional auctioneers, the companies in KwaZulu-Natal operate at Lionsriver, Mooiriver, Creighton, Geluksburg, Dundee, Estcourt, Elandslaagte, Eston, Cedarville, Swartberg, Kokstad, Underberg, Bergville, Seven Oaks and many other sites on a regular basis. They also conduct on-farm auctions or dispersal sales of a specific breed e.g. a dairy auction or a breeding cow or bull auction.

General livestock auctions tend to sell a mixture of animals, beef and dairy cattle, goats and sheep, pigs and chickens.

To buy an animal on auction, one must register with the auctioneers and get a number. **A valid identity document is required.** A refundable deposit of about R2 000 is also required (this varies according to the auction and auctioneer) – this is to ensure that you can pay for the animal you bid for. Animals are presented to the public and anybody registered who wants to buy it can make an offer. The highest offer usually gets to buy the animal. Often an owner puts a reserve price on his animal, if this price is not reached, they do not

have to sell it. It must be noted that the auctioneers take a percentage commission for running the sale and selling the animal. Some farmers are VAT registered and some are not. This must be taken into consideration when participating in a sale. A buyer must also be aware that if there are, for example 10 animals in the ring, bids are made on one average animal but all ten must be bought. Simply put, if the bid goes to R4500 the total cost for the group will be  $R4500 \times 10 = R45\,000$  plus VAT if applicable. Not understanding this point can lead to a great deal of confusion.

To sell an animal one has to also register with the auctioneer and book the animals in to the chosen sale. **All animals must be correctly branded or tattooed with the owners own brand.** The stock theft unit inspects animals and if they do not comply they will not allow them to be sold. The animals on offer must also be in a good condition. The SPCA sends inspectors to the stock sales and any animals that have been abused, injured or starved may be confiscated. Sick or weak animals should NOT be presented for sale – they will give the seller a bad reputation when they cost the buyer money to make them well again. Owners must be present to sell their livestock. **They may NOT send other people to sell on their behalf without a signed affidavit that they may do so, and a valid identity document. This rule helps to reduce the sale of stolen animals.**

It is up to the owners, buying or selling, to transport animals to and from the sales in a safe and humane way. There are a number of transport companies with

trucks both big and small that can be contracted to move stock. Be very careful not to overload a vehicle to save money. An overloaded vehicle can easily lose control and crash, potentially killing or injuring people and livestock. It is also very easy for an animal to “go down” or collapse under the other animals and be trampled to death or not be able to breathe and then die. This is not good for all concerned and the SPCA and traffic police are on the lookout for overloaded trucks.

Vehicles and trailers have to comply with regulations to be suitable to transport animals. **Animals may not be tied down by the legs or body on the back of an unsuitable trailer or vehicle.** They may only be tied by the head (with a halter) or horns to the rails of a suitable vehicle to stop them jumping out. Bakkies and trailers must have suitable approved rails to contain the animals. A crate may not be home made from pieces of wire and wooden poles. The floor of the vehicle must be non-slip, a mesh or rubber mat must be laid on the floor to stop animals slipping and falling. These are most important points as the auctioneer will not allow animals purchased to be loaded into unsuitable vehicles. If animals are loaded onto unsuitable vehicles, the auctioneer and owner can be charged by the SPCA, South African Police Service and/or other animal welfare entities.

While auctions have many advantages there can also be disadvantages. The biggest advantage of an auction is that emerging small-scale farmers can easily buy and sell at a market related price. Large auctions attract a lot of buyers making prices more competitive. The biggest disadvantage is that animals are coming from all sorts of places and from owners one may not know. All kinds of animal diseases may come to the auction. Animals on sale may not have been vaccinated properly and are under a lot of stress being transported and sold. They may fall ill after purchase. As soon as an animal has been sold, responsibility for the animal passes to the new owner and it's welfare is

for his/her account. When looking to purchase animals at an auction establish who the seller is and find out the history of the animals. This will make purchasing them a lot safer if one knows they have been managed well before.

Animals may also come to an auction already ill e.g. redwater, gallsickness or pneumonia. Look at them very carefully before buying.

Disease can easily spread from newly purchased stock to the animals back home. This must be avoided by keeping newly purchased stock away from all other animals until one can be sure they are healthy (i.e. keep them under quarantine for at least two weeks). Sheep can easily have scab which is a notifiable disease (i.e. the state vet must be informed and the area put under quarantine) and is very contagious. Animals may also come with worms and ticks that could cause a problem. Deworm and dip any purchased animal before allowing it to join the herd/flock. Goats and sheep must be vaccinated with pulpy kidney before being dewormed. It may be advisable to inject young stock with a long acting tetracycline when moving them. If moving into a known redwater area in summer, dip and medicate the animals for the disease (called blocking) to give them time to adjust to the new surroundings without becoming ill. Redwater and gallsickness are deadly diseases which can be treated if noticed in time.

When purchasing goats and sheep be very aware of their heartwater status. If the buyer lives in a heartwater area (bushveld) do **NOT** purchase animals from an area that has no heartwater. The animals will have no immunity at all and, unless treated with tetracycline regularly, will probably die of heartwater very quickly. As a general rule of thumb do not buy small stock and move it eastwards unless it is for slaughter purposes. Small stock moving from west to east generally do not survive very long in the new environmental.

If buying animals for breeding or milk production it is very important to know that they are CA (contagious abortion) and TB (tuberculosis) free. Reputable sellers will be able to provide veterinary tests proving their animals are negative. Never buy untested or positive animals.

### Conclusions

Livestock auctions, to a large extent, underpin the economy of livestock trading, especially amongst emerging farmers. They need to be encouraged and supported. However, the onus is on the individual to ensure that quality livestock is traded and transported in an acceptable and humane manner. The health and welfare of the animals being traded is of paramount

importance to both buyer and seller. All reputable auctioneers have websites and are easily accessible.

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**FIGURE 1:** A typical sale yard