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MEDIA STATEMENT

A call for the control and management of the Banana Bunchy Top Virus disease (BBTV)

18 March 2022

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) is calling on all banana growers to take precautionary measures to control the Banana Bunchy Top Virus disease in South Africa.

BBTV is a plant pathogenic virus of the family *Nanoviridae* that is known to infect banana plants. It is the most economically important virus of banana as it renders plants unproductive and can cause up to 100% yield loss. This disease spreads into non-infected areas along with infected planting material and through the banana aphid, *Pentalonia nigronervosa*, which is widespread in all banana and plantain-producing areas. Disease symptoms usually appear about a month after infection. The disease is named after one of the most characteristic symptoms of an advanced infection; when the leaves become progressively dwarfed, upright and bunched at the top of the plant, with wavy and chlorotic margins that tend to turn necrotic. Initial symptoms are more difficult to detect.

Considering the urgent need for collective action to tackle the escalating BBTV threat to the banana industry in the country, an extensive surveillance programme, spearheaded by the National Plant Protection Organization of South Africa within DALRRD and industry bodies, has been established to monitor its spread. To date, the disease has been confirmed to be present in the villages around the Ugu District in KwaZulu-Natal.

The most important factors to consider in controlling Banana Bunchy Top Virus includes the killing of the aphid vector (disease carrier), rogueing (removing and destroying) of infected



banana plants and use of disease-free planting materials. Killing the aphids on the banana plants prevents the spread of viruliferous aphids to the non-infected plants. Since banana is the only host of BBTv, roguing infected matts reduces spread of the virus by reducing the opportunity for aphids to acquire the virus or for people to obtain and transport infected suckers or planting material.

Banana aphids can be treated by either injecting the infested banana plant or by spraying the entire infested banana plant with a registered chemical. All banana plants within 10 metres of the infested banana plant should also be sprayed to reduce aphid populations in the area.

Community members and farmers are requested to cooperate with DALRRD officials and other stakeholders involved in the surveillance of the disease within their areas. Continuous surveillance will assist in ensuring early detection of the disease in new areas and determine the level of spread in the affected areas. This will help in strengthening the early warning and rapid response in managing this disease. All banana-producing regions in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal are advised to stay alert and avoid sourcing uncertified banana propagating materials for planting. BBTv is a regulated pest in terms of the National Control Measures R. 110 of 27 January 1984 of the Agricultural Pests Act, 1983 (Act No. 36 of 1983). R. 110 prohibits the movement of BBTv materials from infected areas to non-infected areas.

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