



Media Statement

17 February 2020

MINISTER DIDIZA UPDATES THE PUBLIC ON THE UNBANNING OF AUCTIONS AND MEASURES TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAK IN THE COUNTRY

Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development Minister Thoko Didiza, MP has today 17 February 2020, announced that the blanket ban on gatherings animals is now lifted, since the outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth three months ago in the Molemole District in Limpopo. The Minister's decision follows the briefing she received from the technical task team over the weekend.

The Minister said, "There are preconditions for the resumption of auctions. Auctions will only be conducted under stringent conditions. All livestock agents must be registered with the Agricultural Produce Agents Council."

The Minister further emphasised that agents already registered with APAC and complaint to the Rules in respect of livestock agents as published in Government Gazette 41473 Board Notice 28 of 2018 may proceed with auctions.

"I wish to draw your attention to the fact that all APAC certificates issued prior to 2 March 2018 have lapsed and renewal should be done on or before 30 March 2020. I therefore encourage all livestock and game traders to contact the APAC for re-registration prior to resuming with their businesses" remarked Minister Didiza.

The lifting the temporary ban on gatherings of animals, is **NOT** implying that such activities are safe. Therefore, the Minister is advising all auctioneers to familiarise themselves with their implementing measures to prevent their animals from becoming infected. These include:

- Not moving high risk animals, such as animals showing signs of disease,; animals from unknown origin or animals originating from known infected areas;
- Only buying animals from known and proven sources;
- Insisting of buyers to be supplied with a veterinary health declaration before animals are brought onto their farms;
- Always placing new arrivals in isolation until you can satisfy yourself of their health status.

“I wish to remind all livestock keepers of their responsibilities in terms of Section 11 of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 that any owner or manager of land on which there are animals to take all reasonable steps to prevent the infection of the animals with any animal disease, or parasite and the spreading thereof from the relevant land or animals,” said Minister Didiza.

“I am aware of the social and economic impact this decision had on livestock owners, traders and the general sector stakeholders. I want to reassure the nation that this decision was not taken lightly and was implemented as a disease control measure” Minister Didiza further added.

The Minister also emphasised that Veterinary Services are continuing to collaborate with affected farmers to determine the best way forward to resolve the outbreaks on the infected farms. Slaughter of cattle at specifically designated abattoirs has started, with additional measures to prevent any disease spread through materials such as heads, feet and offal. “I wish to thank these farmers for cooperating with us,” remarked Minister Didiza.

The Minister also said the outbreak of FMD in the free zone cannot be declared as over yet, although it appears that the initial spread of the disease has been successfully contained. She said there is a long way ahead before as a country we can declare the end of the outbreak, let alone regain the internationally recognised FMD free status with the OIE.

According to the Minister, this outbreak highlighted a number of areas which need urgent and close collaboration between livestock keepers and the government. A team, comprising of industry stakeholders and the FMD subject matter specialists, has already started working on a strategy for the better management of FMD in the controlled area. These measures focus on sustainability of the controlled area and strengthening measures that are already in place.

The outbreak has also highlighted the importance of individual animal identification and traceability, especially with continuous buying and selling of animals. The work on the Livestock Identification and Traceability System (LITS-SA) is at an advanced stage and the implementation of this system is inevitable for better management of diseases in the country. This system should also be able to give us better chances at export market access for our commodities.

The Molemole outbreak was reported on the 1 November in a feedlot in the Capricorn District in Limpopo. This was immediately reported to the OIE. This outbreak was caused by a SAT 2 similar to the one that caused the January 2019, outbreak in Vhembe.

Following initial investigations, the outbreak could be linked to four auctions, held at two auction premises in September and October 2019. Due to the nature of the spread of the disease, through the auction marketing system, numerous properties had to be followed up to determine spread of the infection. In order to prevent further explosive distribution of the infection and allow the veterinary officials to determine the extent of the spread, an intensive system of tracking and tracing livestock movements and locations was put in place. The application of this system necessitated stringent quarantine measures to be put in place.

The measure included mitigation against further spread of the outbreak via auctions through the placement of a temporary ban on gatherings of cloven-hoofed animals nation-wide. “In our approach, we had to balance amongst a few variables, the risks and opportunity costs relating to the possible spread of the disease, economic losses to the entire country and financial losses to stakeholders,” said Minister Didiza.

Other control measures instituted were to place the affected properties under quarantine and not to allow any animals into, through or out of the premises. This was to ensure the virus gets contained in these properties.

Approximately 160 properties were identified with links to the auctions. These include primary properties that either received animals from these auctions, or supplied animals to them, as well as the properties that were indirectly linked. These premises had to be visited, placed under quarantine, with clinical inspection conducted and samples collected as part of the investigation to determine exposure to the infection. Good progress has been made and the precautionary quarantine has been lifted on more than 90 of these properties.

In total, 18 farms were identified where animals tested positive for FMD. Most of the affected properties are commercial cattle farms, including a number of feedlots, which are fortunately all well fenced and where the animals are individually identified and proper records are kept. This made it possible to implement control measures without the use of emergency vaccination, culling or road-blocks.

Of the primary contact premises linked to the auctions, more than 90% have already been visited and their status determined. “This gives the veterinary team sufficient confidence to proceed to the next phase of the control of the outbreak,” concluded Minister Didiza.

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ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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