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MEDIA RELEASE

MINISTER DIDIZA PROVIDES UPDATE ON THE FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAK IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Ms Thoko Didiza hereby announces that the country is currently battling 56 outbreak cases of the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), involving farms and communal areas in the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West and Gauteng. Despite these outbreaks, the government is working hard to clear up the situation.

The minister would like to emphasise that maximum cooperation from all stakeholders in the sector is necessary to achieve control of the outbreaks. "It is important that everyone commits and respects all imposed control measures and collectively find a sustainable solution," said Minister Didiza.

Call to stop illegal movements

The outbreaks currently troubling South Africa were caused by illegal movements of animals out of the FMD controlled zones in Limpopo. Despite the fact that South Africa lost its OIE recognised FMD free zone status in 2019, the permanent movement restrictions remain in place in the FMD protection zones in Limpopo and Mpumalanga and it is illegal to move cloven-hoofed animals and their products out of the FMD protection zone without permission from the state veterinary services.

"I call on all citizens of South Africa to stop the illegal movement of animals out of FMD affected areas. The damages caused by continued FMD outbreaks have a severe negative impact on the economy of the country, as well as the individual animal owners."

"I am pleased that a 49-year old male was arrested at Masisi in the Vhembe District of Limpopo for bringing goats from the FMD controlled zone into the free zone and the law has taken its course." Another case, where animals were illegally moved from an FMD controlled area to auctions in two provinces is being investigated. We warn perpetrators who are illegally moving animals that they will be prosecuted for contravention of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984)."

North West—Gauteng—Free State

Laboratory testing confirmed the outbreak of FMD between Potchefstroom and Ventersdorp in the North West. Disease investigations carried out by the North West Provincial Veterinary Services found that the FMD virus had spread to adjacent farms within a 10-kilometer radius.



FMD positive farms were also detected in Gauteng and the Free State through trace-forward from an auction near Potchefstroom, which took place in March 2022 and from direct sales from infected farms before the infections were detected. There are currently seven positive farms linked to this outbreak event, involving five farms in the North West, one farm in Gauteng and one farm in the Free State.

Limpopo—Gauteng

In Thulamela District, Limpopo, further FMD infected dip tanks were identified in a previously FMD free area to the north of the disease management area, which was declared in 2019. The affected area comprises communal grazing land. Further analysis confirmed that the same SAT3 virus is responsible for the outbreaks in the Free State, North West and Gauteng.

In two separate incidents in April 2022, animals that originated from the vaccinated part of the FMD protection zone in Limpopo were found at two separate auctions. These auctions were stopped and the premises were placed under quarantine.

KwaZulu-Natal

In KwaZulu-Natal, a further two FMD positive dip tanks were found in the Big 5 Hlabisa Municipality and Jozini Municipality. After the disease initially seemed to be under control in the disease management area, which was declared in September 2021, subsequent illegal movement of animals led to the disease escaping the disease management area, one case being the result of the movement of cattle for a *lobola* ritual. A total of 43 dip tanks have become infected in this area since the disease was first diagnosed in May 2021.

Control measures implemented

All affected farms, dip tanks and other premises in the five affected provinces were placed under quarantine and no cloven-hoofed animals are allowed to move from these locations. There has been no change in the movement restrictions on cloven-hoofed animals, their products and genetic material out of, into, within or through the disease management areas, which are still in effect in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. The margins of the two disease management areas are being considered to include the newly affected areas and other areas at high risk owing to uncontrolled mingling of animals. Culling, like all control measures, will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the practicality, costs, advantage and disadvantage of each scenario.

State controlled FMD vaccination

The FMD vaccination campaigns in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal are still ongoing in the areas where there is active virus circulation and where the animals are not fenced in to effectively prevent co-mingling. However, the use of the FMD vaccine is strictly controlled by state veterinary services and the vaccine is not available for sale to the general public. The FMD vaccine can only be used in pre-authorised areas after the risks have been weighed. The department has become aware of companies advertising the sale of FMD vaccines and wishes to make it clear that the sale or use of such vaccines is illegal.



Safeguard your herds

The minister wishes to remind livestock owners that FMD is transmitted by moving cattle from infected premises. All farmers, livestock owners, members of industry and other stakeholders are again urged to use caution when buying cattle. Protect your herd from becoming infected with FMD by following the “buyer beware” precautions. The following principles are imperative to safeguard your herds’ health status:

- a) Abide by all veterinary movement restrictions.
- b) Know the health status of the animals you are investing in.
- c) Only buy animals that originate from known and proven sources.
- d) Insist on a veterinary health declaration before animals are brought onto the farm.
- e) If in doubt, request a health attestation from the seller’s veterinarian.
- f) Keep the new arrivals to your farm separate from your own animals for at least 28 days, and until you are satisfied that they are healthy.
- g) Do not move animals showing signs of disease.
- h) Do not buy animals from unknown origins.
- i) Do not buy animals originating from known infected areas.
- j) Improve biosecurity on your farm to protect your animals from diseases coming onto the farm and avoid nose-to-nose contact with the neighbour’s cattle.
- k) Avoid buying animals from live auctions where animals have gathered from many different origins, especially if not intended for immediate slaughter.

In essence, where possible, keep your livestock separate from other livestock.

Report suspicions of FMD to state veterinary services

Animals showing suspicious clinical symptoms (salivation, blisters in the mouth, limping or hoof lesions) must not be moved under any circumstances. It should be noted that varied clinical symptoms are seen in these outbreaks, with some farms showing almost no signs, some showing only foot lesions, while others show pronounced mouth lesions. This makes it necessary to report any suspicion of FMD or linkage to an FMD affected property to the state veterinary services for further follow up. If there is any suspicion of FMD or linkage to an FMD affected property, members of the public must contact the state veterinary services or their private veterinarians immediately.

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