

## **Groundbreaking Technology Heading to SA: Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) signs a Licensing Agreement with Moredun Institute to Acquire the Technology for the fight against Snotsiekte**

The state-owned vaccine manufacturer, Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP), wishes to announce that it has signed a licensing agreement with Moredun Institute in Scotland, UK, to acquire the technology which will lead to the final development, registration, and production of the vaccine against Bovine Malignant Catarrhal Fever (BMC) or “Snotsiekte”, which is a fatal disease that has been causing serious losses in the cattle farming community over the past few decades in South Africa.

BMC, commonly known as “snotsiekte”, is a notifiable and untreatable viral disease, which is found in cattle, and is predominantly transmitted by black and blue wildebeest. Dr Peter Oberem, veterinarian and game farmer says: “It is a virus carried specifically by healthy wildebeest. When the wildebeest become stressed, due to calving or weaning, the immunity is suppressed and they shed the snotsiekte virus from the respiratory tract. Cattle within a vicinity of a kilometre of these shedding wildebeest will begin to show symptoms, a month or more after exposure.

Thousands of cattle die annually from this disease, which has caused economic losses for cattle farmers. This distress is exacerbated by the unpleasant nature of the disease; affected animals develop a severe pneumonia, which results in difficulty breathing and eventually suffocate from their own mucus. Cattle with advanced cases of snotsiekte are often euthanised, to prevent further suffering.

“There is currently no effective treatment known for the disease, and while moving cattle away from wildebeest during high-risk periods helps, having a vaccine will help add a layer of protection to cattle herds, especially where movement of animals may not be practical. The availability of an effective vaccine will therefore be a huge milestone for food security in the control of this devastating disease that has become a serious problem in the cattle farming sector in South Africa. This will also help promote a healthy interface between cattle and game farming into the future, relieving tension between the two sectors and allowing recognition of the contribution each sector brings to the country’s agricultural economy,” said Dr. Sello Maboe, veterinarian and Technical manager at OBP.

Dr George Russell, Principal Scientist, Moredun Research Institute said, “We have been working on a protective vaccine for bovine malignant catarrhal fever for more than fifteen years, and following successful experimental and field trials of the vaccine in

the UK, Kenya and South Africa, Moredun is delighted to support this partnership with OBP to further develop the vaccine for use in Africa”.

“OBP will work with partners in the South African livestock industry to diligently further develop and successfully improve the technologies, with the hopes of registering and launching the “Snotsiekte” vaccine in South Africa,” says Dr. Dungu. This is a scoop for OBP as there is currently no other BMC vaccine available, so it could be made available to other African countries where the disease causes problems in southern and East Africa.

Professor Julie Fitzpatrick, Scientific Director at Moredun Research Institute said, “Moredun Research Institute is committed to providing innovative vaccines for common endemic diseases of livestock, wherever they occur. The vaccine for MCF is a world first and it is very much hoped that it will reduce disease in cattle and improve the livelihoods of farmers across affected parts of Africa”.

**Ends**

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