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## **PRESS BRIEFING STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, MR JOHN STEENHUISEN ON FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE VACCINATION AND VACCINE ACQUISITION AT THE IMBIZO MEDIA CENTRE, PARLIAMENT ON 1 JUNE 2026**

Good morning and thank you for joining us.

Today I want to provide an update on South Africa's response to Foot and mouth disease (FMD), the progress that has been made, the challenges that remain, and the next phase of our efforts to protect the livestock sector and restore confidence throughout the agricultural economy.

Let me begin with the facts.

Since February this year, South Africa has procured 13.5 million doses of Foot and Mouth Disease vaccine and as of the 28th May, we have vaccinated just under 4.4 million animals across the country. This is the largest vaccine acquisition programme ever undertaken by the South African state.

Last week 3.5 million Biogenesis Bago vaccine doses arrived in South Africa, significantly strengthening our ability to accelerate vaccination across affected and at-risk areas, and will be distributed as follows: 1.5 million to the Feedlot Industry; 500 000 to the Red Meat Producers Organisation; 200 000 to the Milk Producers Organisation; 100 000 to the Stud Breeders Industry; 1.05 million to the provinces and we have set aside some for regional vaccination along our borders.

I can also announce that the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) has approved the Section 21 application for Dunevax to import 14 million doses of the Dollvet vaccine, of which the first consignment of 4 million doses will arrive during this month. This vaccine pipeline will ensure that we are able to deliver the required booster vaccinations.

Importantly, government has funded this response.

To date, government has already spent R494 million on vaccine procurement and deployment.

Too often this fact is overlooked in public debate. We have carried the financial burden of this intervention because the cost of inaction would have been far greater. Protecting the national cattle population, safeguarding jobs, preserving food security and restoring confidence in the livestock economy are national priorities.

The vaccination programme is now being implemented at a scale never before seen in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal remains at the centre of the vaccination effort with more than 1,1 million animals vaccinated. The Free State has vaccinated more than 600 000 animals, the Eastern Cape more than 720 000, Mpumalanga more than 430 000; Limpopo more than 350 000; Gauteng more than 270 000; North West more than 430 00; Western Cape more than 260 000 and the Northern Cape more than 87 000. Last week I wrote to all MEC's to continue accelerating the deployment of vaccines.

However, statistics alone do not tell the full story.

I want to acknowledge, sincerely and directly, the hardship that many farmers have experienced over the course of this outbreak. Farmers have seen movement restrictions limit their ability to trade. They have carried increased feed costs while animals remained on farms for longer than intended. They have

faced uncertainty regarding markets, cash flow and future production decisions. Many have experienced significant financial losses and enormous emotional strain.

I have spent time with affected farmers across the country. I have listened to their frustrations. I have heard their concerns. I understand their impatience. No one feels the consequences of an outbreak more directly than the farmer whose livelihood depends on healthy animals and functioning markets.

I also want to acknowledge the sacrifices many producers have made in complying with movement restrictions, vaccination programmes and disease-control measures despite the severe financial pressure they have faced. Their cooperation has been essential to containing the outbreak and protecting the broader livestock industry.

While this outbreak has presented an enormous challenge, it has also reinforced an important lesson: animal diseases do not respect borders. That is why one of the most significant developments of the past week occurred not within South Africa, but at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Ministerial Meeting in Zimbabwe.

South Africa strongly welcomes the decision by SADC Ministers and the Livestock Technical Committee to prioritise the development of a Regional Coordination Framework for Foot and Mouth Disease control. In a region where livestock mobility, wildlife interfaces and cross-border trade are deeply interconnected, stronger regional coordination is critical.

This framework moves us beyond fragmented national responses towards a more coordinated, risk-based and preventative regional system. Progressive buffer zoning, compartmentalisation models, coordinated regional biosecurity corridors, stronger surveillance systems and improved vaccination cooperation across borders will allow us to contain outbreaks more effectively while protecting trade flows, safeguarding agricultural production and strengthening food security across the region.

Some critics have argued that the rollout of vaccines should have happened faster. I understand that frustration. But it is important to remember that for many years our biosecurity systems were largely geared towards reacting to outbreaks after they occurred. What we have been required to do over the past several months is fundamentally different.

We have had to secure extensive vaccine supply chains, expand diagnostic capacity, strengthen surveillance systems, coordinate provinces, engage industry and rebuild the machinery required for a truly national response. We have had to shift from a reactive system to a proactive, preventative and risk-based approach to biosecurity.

That transition takes time. But the results are now becoming visible

Today South Africa has vaccine stocks available at levels never previously achieved. Vaccination is taking place at scale. Industry participation is increasing. Provincial coordination is improving. Diagnostic capacity is stronger. And we are steadily moving towards restoring confidence throughout the livestock sector.

#### Diagnostic Capacity Expansion

The ARC is awaiting Memorandum of Agreements from KwaZulu Natal and the Department of Agriculture in the Eastern Cape for secondment of Veterinary Technologists – three from each of these provinces for training on FMD Diagnostics;

KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape Laboratories are assessed and being readied;

Deactivation of samples prior to sending to the KwaZulu Natal and the Western Cape Laboratories being arranged. It is expected that they will receive the samples by 30 June 2026;

Additional skilled personnel are being onboarded at the ARC. The first group of 11 South African Veterinary Council registered Veterinary Technicians recruited on 1 April 2026 completed the compulsory training and have been added to the FMD serology team;

Six Veterinary Technicians accepted employment offers and were enrolled for the competence training Programme;

The recruitment of six Administration Assistants and three Research Assistants is at an Advanced stage.

At the same time, we have worked relentlessly to protect and expand market access for South African livestock products despite the outbreak. Disease control and market access must go hand in hand. There is little value in restoring production if producers cannot access markets.

We have therefore engaged extensively with trading partners to maintain confidence in South Africa's animal health systems and to secure practical solutions that allow trade to continue wherever possible under appropriate risk-management measures.

As a result, Jordan remains open and exports are already taking place. The United Arab Emirates has agreed updated certification arrangements and continues to accept South African products under the new framework. Hong Kong remains open for red meat products and exports are continuing. Kuwait remains open under agreed conditions, while discussions with Qatar are progressing constructively.

In addition, South Africa will this week formally engage a number of strategically important markets, including Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, with proposals aimed at facilitating continued trade under science-based and risk-based conditions.

These developments matter because every market retained, reopened or expanded supports jobs, protects farm incomes, sustains processing facilities and strengthens confidence throughout the value chain.

Importantly, this has never been a government-only response.

From the outset, we have worked closely with organised agriculture, commodity organisations, veterinarians, feedlots, processors, dairy producers and other industry stakeholders. The various industry task teams established throughout this process have made an important contribution to the national response and have helped shape many of the interventions now being implemented.

We have consistently maintained from the outset: that government and industry must work together if we are to successfully combat FMD. Long before the judgment, we had already established close partnerships with producers, veterinarians, feedlots, processors and commodity organisations to support government's response to the crisis while maintaining the integrity of South Africa's animal health system as well as our international standing with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Our focus remains exactly where it has always been: getting vaccines into animals, controlling the disease, reopening markets and protecting livelihoods. The judgment provides additional certainty and momentum to accelerate the work that was already underway. It allows us to deepen public-private cooperation with even greater confidence while

In the coming weeks, we will launch an overarching Public-Private Biosecurity Model that will bring together the lessons, partnerships and capabilities developed during this outbreak into a formal, coordinated national framework. The principle is straightforward. Biosecurity cannot be the responsibility of government alone, nor can it be carried by industry alone. Protecting South Africa's agricultural economy requires a durable partnership based on shared responsibility, coordinated action and effective risk management.

Getting the value chain functioning normally again means farmers can sell animals, feedlots can buy cattle, processors can operate at scale and consumers can benefit from a more stable and affordable supply of meat and other livestock products. More animals moving through the value chain means more production, more competition, more jobs and ultimately more affordable protein for South African households.

Despite the challenges posed by Foot and Mouth Disease, severe storms and ongoing logistics constraints, South African agriculture continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience. Agricultural exports grew by 7% over the past year, with the citrus industry recording one of its strongest export performances on record. The sector generated a trade surplus of approximately US\$7.3 billion in 2025, an increase of 18% on the previous year, supported in part by the opening of new export markets. While primary agriculture contributes around 2.8% of GDP directly, the broader agricultural value chain accounts for approximately 14% of economic activity, underscoring the critical role that agriculture plays

in driving growth. Protecting animal health is therefore not only about safeguarding livestock; it is about protecting jobs, exports, rural livelihoods and one of the country's most important economic engines

The war against Foot and Mouth Disease is far from over, but for the first time since this crisis began, South Africa is increasingly setting the pace of the response rather than reacting to the disease.

And we will continue until South Africa has not only defeated this outbreak, but built a stronger, more resilient biosecurity system capable of protecting farmers, safeguarding food security, supporting agricultural growth and strengthening rural livelihoods for generations to come.

I thank you.

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