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Media release

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MEDIA STATEMENT

UPDATE ON OUTBREAK OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN THE EASTERN CAPE AND KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCES

Currently, there are two Provinces with ongoing Foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks, while all other FMD outbreaks have been resolved and closed with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

Eastern Cape Province

The outbreak in the Eastern Cape Province remains stable, with no new outbreaks reported in the past three months. However, it cannot be excluded at this stage that the disease may still be active on some of the affected farms. Therefore, the Disease Management Area (DMA), which was declared in July 2024, remains in place and measures will continue to be strictly applied during the festive season.

Once the necessary surveillance on farms in the area have proven that there are no undetected pockets of ongoing infection, Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen will consider lifting the movement restrictions of the DMA. The 73 infected and/or vaccinated farms will remain under quarantine and will be subject to different, but ongoing future movement control and surveillance strategies for at least another 12 months to confirm the absence of virus resurgence on these farms. Minister Steenhuisen urges farmers to continue with strict biosecurity measures to avoid a recurrence of the disease in the area.

KwaZulu-Natal Province

Following the spread of the outbreak in KwaZulu-Natal to uPongola Local Municipality, a few dip tanks have been placed under movement restrictions to contain the outbreak. Vaccination is continuing at the affected dip tanks, and those in the surrounding area that are deemed to be at highest risk. The borders of the DMA in KZN are currently under review and will be adjusted to include the new outbreak and additionally identified risk areas. There was also a flare-up of the disease in the Mtubatuba area, which is being contained through movement control and vaccination. Awareness campaigns are ongoing to urge all livestock owners in KZN to remain extra vigilant and to limit the movement of live cloven-hoofed animals as much as possible.

Control Measures in the country

In addition to the control measures in affected areas as mentioned above, cloven-hoofed livestock in South Africa may only be moved if accompanied by a health declaration from the owner of the animals, attesting to their health at the time of moving. In addition, all cattle, sheep, and goats newly brought onto a farm must be kept separate from the resident herds for at least 28 days as required by law since October 2022.

The Department of Agriculture strongly recommends that all livestock farmers in the country limit animal movement as far as possible. The significance of the incubation period for FMD cannot be over-emphasized. This is the period when animals appear to be healthy, in the early stages of infection (incubation period) where they are shedding virus without showing clinical signs of disease yet.

Section 11 of the Animal Diseases Act imposes a legal duty on any owner or manager of animals to take all reasonable steps to prevent their animals from becoming infected with any disease and to prevent the spread of any disease from their animals or land to other animals or other properties.

Essential biosecurity measures include limiting and/or postponing the introduction of new animals if possible and, if necessary, only introducing animals from known clean farms with a health declaration, preventing nose-to-nose contact of farm animals with animals outside the farm, maintaining secure farm boundaries, and restricting access for people and vehicles as much as possible.

FMD is a controlled animal disease in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984). Any suspicious clinical symptoms (salivation, blisters in the mouth, limping or hoof lesions) must be reported to the local State Veterinarian immediately and such animals must not be moved under any circumstances. The Act prescribes certain control measures, like isolation and movement control, that are being enforced by Veterinary Services.

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