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Media release

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UPDATE ON OUTBREAK OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

The ongoing Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreaks in the Eastern Cape Province remain a significant concern for the Minister of Agriculture. In the Humansdorp area, 33 farms have now been confirmed to have cases of the disease. Cattle on these farms have been vaccinated to reduce the viral load and lessen the severity of clinical symptoms, particularly in dairy cattle. Additionally, 37 farms have been pre-emptively vaccinated to prevent the disease from spreading. Since the start of the outbreak, a total of 93,064 cattle and 635 sheep have been vaccinated in the Eastern Cape.

Farms that are either infected or vaccinated remain under quarantine, with animal movements restricted. Movements from these farms are only permitted with state veterinary approval for direct slaughter. Farm owners are also required to enforce strict biosecurity measures to prevent the disease from spreading via animals, vehicles, equipment, or people.

On 26 July 2024, the Department declared a Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Disease Management Area (DMA), covering parts of the Kouga and Kou-Kamma Municipalities. Movements of animals into, through, within, or out of this area are strictly controlled and may only occur with state veterinary permission. Farms must be inspected and tested, and declared free of the disease before any animals are allowed to move.

Despite these measures, there are indications that the virus persists in the affected areas. Some farms previously infected have experienced flare-ups, and new infections have been identified on four farms located on or near the borders of the DMA. This raises concerns and demonstrates that movement restrictions and biosecurity protocols are not being fully adhered to. Additionally, reports of illegal animal movements within the DMA have surfaced,

which could lead to continued circulation and spread of the virus.

The outbreak, which began in May 2024, can be contained if all stakeholders adhere to the control measures. Unfortunately, the ongoing virus circulation and spread is a result of non-compliance by some stakeholders, which puts the entire region—and the country—at risk. The Department is working with law enforcement to investigate these reports, and those found contravening the quarantine and DMA restrictions will face legal consequences. The public is encouraged to report any information regarding illegal movements or breaches of biosecurity.

In East London, the outbreak has been successfully contained, and the Department thanks the affected farmers in this area for their vigilance and cooperation. Animals on these farms will undergo controlled slaughter at designated abattoirs. Controlled slaughter ensures that FMD risk materials are properly processed or disposed of, and only safe products are released into the local market. While meat from FMD-restricted farms cannot be exported due to certification constraints, it remains safe for human consumption.

The Director of Animal Health has designated three abattoirs to handle the slaughter of cloven-hoofed animals from FMD-quarantined farms. Seven farms have been granted permission for controlled slaughter at these abattoirs. To date, 430 cattle from FMD-quarantined farms in the Eastern Cape Province have been slaughtered.

National Movement Restrictions, Legal Responsibilities, Reporting Requirements and Biosecurity Protocols

In addition to the control measures within the DMA in the Eastern Cape Province, the July 2024 Gazette Notice stipulates that cloven-hoofed livestock across South Africa may only be moved if accompanied by a health declaration from the owner, attesting to the animals' health at the time of movement. While this has been a legal requirement since October 2022, its importance is being reiterated to prevent the further spread of FMD.

The Department of Agriculture strongly advises all livestock farmers nationwide to limit animal movement as much as possible. Cloven-hoofed animals should not be moved unless absolutely necessary. Limiting movement provides an opportunity to identify and quarantine further undetected, affected properties, thus preventing any further spread of the disease. The significance of the incubation period for FMD cannot be overstated. During this period, animals may appear healthy while shedding the virus and not yet displaying clinical signs of the disease.

Farmers are again urged to observe stringent biosecurity measures on their farms to protect their herds from infection. Section 11 of the Animal Diseases Act imposes a legal duty on animal owners or managers to take all reasonable steps to prevent their animals from becoming infected and to prevent the spread of any disease from their animals or land to others.

Essential Biosecurity Measures Include:

- Any cattle, sheep, or goats newly introduced to a farm must be kept separate from resident herds for at least 28 days.
- Only introduce animals accompanied by a health declaration from known clean farms.
- Prevent nose-to-nose contact between farm animals and animals outside the farm.

- Maintain secure farm boundaries and restrict access for people and vehicles as much as possible.
- Ensure that farm personnel have no contact with animals outside the property.
- Provide clean clothing and washing facilities for all visitors and personnel, and ensure thorough cleaning and disinfection of any vehicles and farming implements brought onto a property.
- Regularly consult with the responsible private and state veterinarian and animal health technician to refine biosecurity measures.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is classified as a controlled animal disease under the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984), which mandates specific control measures, such as isolation and movement restrictions, enforced by Veterinary Services.

Any suspicious clinical symptoms, such as salivation, blisters in the mouth, limping, or hoof lesions, should be reported immediately to the local State Veterinarian, and such animals must not be moved under any circumstances.

For more information, contact:

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