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Mass vaccination of poultry to combat Avian Influenza and an update on foot-mouth-disease

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen today announced the first ever mass vaccination of poultry in the country in order to protect the local flock from avian influenza.
“Our vaccination team, comprised of poultry specialist vets from the University of Pretoria, along with the Agricultural Research Council, has received a list of farms to be vaccinated from the poultry industry and is prioritising high risk areas and commercial flocks to contain the virus and prevent further culling. We have secured vaccine supply, ensured cold chain capacity, and are building in traceability and reporting mechanisms as part of a wider preparedness strategy,” said the minister.
In addition to this, 50 animal health technicians on a short-term contract to assist with the vaccination roll out was appointed and their induction and refresher training is expected to start next week.

Foot-and-mouth- disease outbreak

Regarding the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak, Minister Steenhuisen announced that the Department of Agriculture has ordered vaccines to cover the KwaZulu-Natal area, while assessment, as well forward and backward tracing of the outbreak in Gauteng is ongoing. Over 900 000 doses of vaccines were ordered, and the first batch is expected to arrive next week.
“These plans are not only about responding to outbreaks, but also about building permanent infrastructure to manage future risks. “More broadly, we are establishing a Biosecurity Council that will bring together the South African Police Service (SAPS), veterinarians, scientists, the Border Management Authority, and industry. We are rolling out a farm to fork national traceability system for livestock.”

Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) is also being upgraded to restore vaccine self sufficiency and rural veterinary services and emergency response are enhanced. The dip tank model in partnership with traditional leaders are also being introduced.
“Biosecurity is not an agricultural issue alone. It is a national security issue, and we are treating it as such.”

Karan Beef Outbreak

In the second half of May 2025, clinical signs of FMD were reported in cattle on the East Rand in Gauteng. Samples were collected and FMD infection was confirmed. The affected cattle are kept informally on shared grazing and additional herds kept in the same area were also found to be infected. Cattle on an adjacent dairy farm was also confirmed to be infected. Epidemiological investigations are ongoing to identify and test all adjacent and linked locations.

On 30 May 2025, an abattoir in Mpumalanga reported lesions suspect for FMD that were identified on post mortem meat inspection. Following traceback to the origin of the cattle, a large feedlot in Gauteng was identified and found to be positive for FMD. Further investigations are ongoing to determine the origin of the animals that entered the feedlot in the past month, in order to identify the source of the infection.

Minister Steenhuisen has praised Karan Beef for their quick response to the FMD outbreak at their Heidelberg facility. During a virtual meeting last night with Karan Beef and departmental officials, minister commended them for their containment measures and having a plan in place. This is key to preventing the spread of the disease and protecting the broader agricultural sector.

Karan Beef is working with State Veterinary Services to implement the plan and minimize further risk. The company has reiterated their commitment to transparency, compliance and animal health and welfare.

Status of the outbreaks in KwaZulu-Natal

There are still signs of active virus circulation in the Disease Management Area (DMA) in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), with some outbreaks detected outside of the DMA. An abattoir in the Vryheid area in the DMA is in the process of being designated to slaughter animals from

premises under FMD restrictions. A system has been put in place to assess the level of biosecurity on individual farms, with the intention of aligning the control measures to the biosecurity risks.

Stable status of the outbreak in Mpumalanga

FMD was reported in April 2025 on one farm in the Gert Sibande Municipality, which was identified as a trace forward from an auction in KZN. Following one round of targeted surveillance of surrounding farms, there are no signs that this outbreak spread to any adjacent farms or other linked locations. The second round of surveillance has commenced.

Trade suspension imposed by the People's Republic of China

As a result of the spread of the KZN outbreaks to Mpumalanga and Gauteng Provinces, the People's Republic of China has suspended imports of cloven-hoofed animals and related products. Preliminary information obtained confirmed that this suspension includes only beef from the whole of South Africa to China. The export of wool that has been processed to destroy FMD virus, have not been affected.

Actions taken by the department

Minister Steenhuisen has escalated control efforts to the Deputy Director-General's office due to the seriousness of the matter. The office of the DDG has already held meetings with Veterinary Services and industry representatives to detail the actions required to curb this threat. The biosecurity, traceability and record keeping of animals bought and sold at auctions and similar industries were raised as a specific concern and this will be addressed by government in the near future.

Caution to buyers and sellers of livestock

Livestock owners in the country should take note of the incubation period of FMD. This is a period of 2 – 14 days, within which animals can appear clinically healthy, before they start showing clinical signs generally associated with FMD. This highlights the importance of keeping newly bought animals separated from the resident herd for at least 28 days, even if

a health attestation was issued for the animals. The health attestation and 28-day separation have been a legal requirement since October 2022.

Biosecurity and awareness in the whole country

The Department urges all livestock farmers in the whole country to limit animal movement as far as possible. We request auctioneers and livestock owners to be vigilant when buying cloven hoofed animals from provinces where there are active FMD outbreaks. No cloven-hoofed animals should be accepted from areas under restriction for FMD in KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga.

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 at all possible and, if absolutely 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, 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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