



MINISTER
AGRICULTURE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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MINISTER STEENHUISEN INTERVENES TO SUPPORT POULTRY INDUSTRY WITH NEW AVIAN INFLUENZA VACCINATION POLICY

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, has stepped in to amend the Animal Diseases Regulations (R.2026 of 1986) to allow the introduction of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) vaccinations in the Republic. This decision is a direct intervention to assist the poultry sector with a sustainable way forward in combating bird flu.

This regulatory change follows a formal objection submitted by the South African Poultry Association (SAPA) under Section 23 of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984). SAPA highlighted a breakdown in the department's Directorate: Animal Health, reporting continuous failure to provide a practical or affordable solution to HPAI and prevent any potential crisis. Poultry producers argued that the department kept them stuck in an outdated system that forced the mass culling of birds, leaving them without any modern legal tools to protect their flocks.

Minister Steenhuisen reviewed the Section 23 Investigation Committee's report and has decided to act on its recommendations to break the administrative deadlock. The minister strongly believes that the report provides an opportunity to move the department's HPAI eradication measures away from the old "stamping-out" model—which legally required the destruction of both healthy and sick birds—to a state-regulated vaccination defence plan to eradicate the disease.

"Our poultry farmers need direct support, and we are changing policy to give them a legal mechanism to protect their livelihoods.

"The old regulations forced the industry to destroy flocks unnecessarily, which harmed agricultural businesses and raised food prices for consumers. By changing this policy, we are giving producers the legal right to use verified scientific tools to protect their farms, protect agricultural jobs, and secure affordable food for the public," said Minister Steenhuisen

What the policy shift means for the poultry industry

The formalisation of an HPAI Vaccination Framework under the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984) will change how poultry operations run in South Africa:

- Farmers will use a combination of vaccination, biosecurity, and testing, which stops the requirement for widespread bird culling and lowers financial losses;

- The department will amend the Animal Diseases Regulations (R.2026) or issue a formal Section 9 control measure, to establish a clear legal framework on how poultry farming entities must manage an HPAI outbreak once identified on their farms. The objective of this measure is to eliminate mixed enforcement rules that created confusion and weakened the capacity to quickly eradicate the disease;
- The new rules will balance disease control requirements so that both big commercial operations and smallholder farmers can have the space in line with the new regulations to efficiently and effectively deal with HPAI outbreaks on their farms;
- The department's role will be to set up and run national surveillance systems for HPAI, laboratory testing, and ensuring that farming entities adhere to regulations when there are outbreaks on their farms;
- The department will also focus on maintaining international trade standards to ensure market access.

Minister Steenhuisen has instructed the department to immediately put interim control measures in place while the policy shift is being formalised through the appropriate statutory instruments to ensure an orderly transition for the sector and provided a deadline for the publishing of the gazette.

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