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MEDIA BRIEFING BY MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, JOHN STEENHUISEN, ON OUTCOMES OF HIS TRIP TO LATIN AMERICA; THE PUBLICATION OF THE SECTION 10 SCHEME AND OTHER RELATED FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE ISSUES

05 MAY 2026

Farmers;

Farming Communities;

Farming Organisations;

And all other stakeholders

We stand at a crossroads in the history of South African agriculture. For too long, Foot and mouth disease (FMD) has cast a shadow over our livestock sector, threatening the livelihoods of our farmers and our country's food security.

On Sunday, I returned from high-level working visits to Brazil and Argentina with a strategic set of partnerships and interventions designed to move us from a defensive posture to a decisive offensive in the war against FMD.

In Argentina, our mission was to ensure that we ensure a steady vaccine supply. We cannot fight a biological war without ammunition. We have already distributed 2.5 million doses of FMD vaccines which were procured from the renowned vaccine manufacturer, Biogénesis Bagó in Argentina.

Accompanied by team members from my Ministry, the Department of Agriculture as well as the CEO of Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP), the CEO of the Agriculture Research Council (ARC) and the Chairpersons of industry bodies AGRI SA, RIMS and AFASA – I personally inspected the production facilities where another five million doses are ready for export, pending finalization of the required import procedures.

During this visit, OBP and Biogénesis Bagó signed a distribution agreement that will guarantee that our vaccine pipeline remains stable and reliable. This is a very important and critical move as FMD outbreaks are currently being experienced in various parts of the world, including regions in Europe, the Middle East and the Asia Pacific. Countries such as Greece, China, Cyprus, Israel, and most recently Germany, have reported outbreaks which means that we will see the demand for vaccines increase dramatically.

Furthermore, the specific SAT1 topotype 3 virus that we are currently battling has been reported in Turkey in November 2025, Azerbaijan in October 2025, Lebanon in November 2025, Israel in January 2026, Cyprus in December 2025 and February 2026, as well as Syria in January 2026.

Our focus is also not limited by our own borders. Following a close study of the regionalization model used in South America, we will use the upcoming SADC Agriculture Ministers' Meeting later this month to call for a similar regional approach as well as the establishment of a regional vaccine bank. This will allow for a consolidated regional approach to combatting FMD.

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) has also renewed its partnership with Argentina's National Agricultural Technology Institute (INTA) to ensure our vaccine innovation remains world-class.

Brazil is a nation that has achieved what many thought impossible - recognition by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) as an FMD-free country without vaccination as of May 2025. Their 64-year journey offers us a roadmap for our own ten-year strategy. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. We can adjust and follow the blueprint that has already led others across the finish line. Our strategy is now anchored in moving from a reactive state to a partnership-driven model that prioritises scientific results and reliable supply chains.

We have signed a Memorandum of Intent (MoI) and an Action Plan which will immediately accelerate our FMD eradication efforts. Later this month, a team of South African animal health experts will travel to Brazil for an intensive knowledge exchange on FMD, traceability and surveillance methods. On the cards is also the possibility of a Brazil-South Africa Biosecurity Corridor. This involves joint early-warning systems and harmonized risk assessments, turning biosecurity from a trade barrier into a bridge for economic growth. Furthermore, we are addressing the trade imbalance by expediting access to the Brazilian market for South African apples and citrus fruit.

I am also pleased to inform you that this ministerial visit to Brazil was the first to operationalise some of the outcomes of President Cyril Ramaphosa's State Visit which took place in March this year.

The outcome of these visits is a fundamental shift in how we handle animal health. We are moving away from isolated, reactive measures toward a South-South Strategic Alliance.

By integrating international science with local production, we are closing the gap between policy and practice. We are bringing the private sector into the fold under government coordination to ensure vaccines reach every farm as efficiently as possible.

It is important that our farmers know that we have heard their cries. There is no shortage of critics, but given the enormity of this task, we are making steady progress. Our plan to align with global leaders is not to simply manage an outbreak, but to build a resilient, competitive, and sustainable agricultural sector that will restore international confidence in South African beef and livestock. The

war against FMD is far from over, but for the first time in decades, there is a solid, scientific plan to steer us in the right direction.

Routine Vaccination Scheme

I can announce that yesterday, Monday 4 May 2026, the Routine Vaccination Scheme was published in the Government Gazette. As government, we understand that in the business of farming, time is money and delay is a risk you can't afford. While we are busy rolling out the national, fully funded vaccination program, we know our commercial partners need the flexibility to protect their livestock now.

This voluntary scheme is essentially a fast-track option that allows farmers to take the lead in their own biosecurity efforts without first having to wait for the national rollout of vaccines to reach their area. The Scheme was established under Section 10 of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984).

We considered over 300 submissions in record time to ensure constitutional compliance with public participation processes. The scheme is no longer envisaged - it is official. But it should be made clear - FMD is a notifiable disease which requires a co-ordinated approach. We will not be distracted in any way - we are clear on what we want to achieve and will make use of scientific approaches and global best practice to win the war against FMD.

This scheme operates as a public-private partnership, enabling owners of cloven-hoofed animals to mitigate the impact of FMD through voluntary vaccination, carried out under the oversight of state veterinary services. Participating animal owners are required to appoint a private veterinarian or Animal Health Technician, authorised by the Director: Animal Health, to perform the duties set out in the scheme schedule, under the supervision of state veterinary authorities. It is important to note that there are certain requirements for participation in the scheme, namely:

- Every animal in the program must be traceable. This means they must have a permanent mark (like a brand or tattoo) and a unique ear tag so that they can be tracked from birth to slaughter.
- Owners must enlist an authorised veterinarian or veterinary assistant to oversee the vaccinations.
- Participants must use a digital traceability system to record when an animal was vaccinated, the vaccine batch number, and even the temperature of the fridge where the vaccine was stored.
- Owners must allow audits and inspections to prove that they are following the Scheme's safety rules. By having a formal, recorded vaccination plan, farmers can prove their animals are healthy. This makes it easier to ensure business continuity so that shelves remain stocked and South African meat can still be traded safely.

It should be further noted that the livestock owner will pay for the vaccines and the veterinarian's services. However, government may consider subsidies or cost-sharing in the future to ensure greater participation in the Scheme.

Lifting the DMA in KwaZulu-Natal

Over the past several years, the farming community of KwaZulu-Natal has stood on the front line of a difficult battle against FMD. Since the first Disease Management Area (DMA) was declared in 2021, our agricultural sector in this province has operated under a cloud of restriction, with movement controls designed to protect our national herd. However, as the situation has evolved - so too must our strategy. Today, I am announcing the formal lifting of the Foot and mouth disease restrictions within the KwaZulu-Natal Disease Management Area. This decision is not merely administrative; it is rooted in a shift in the epidemiological story of the province.

By 2026, the reality on the ground changed significantly, with FMD outbreaks spreading to all districts across KwaZulu-Natal. Ironically, our data now shows that the very areas tucked inside the DMA have seen fewer outbreaks compared to the regions outside its borders. We find ourselves in a position where there is more evidence of the virus circulating in the rest of the province than within the restricted management area itself.

We must also consider the human and economic cost of these measures. Our farmers within the DMA have been economically burdened by these movement restrictions, facing challenges that their neighbours in other districts, and indeed other provinces with equally unstable infections, have not had to face.

To continue with separate, localised rules for different parts of the same province has become scientifically and ethically difficult to justify. It is no longer fair to ask these specific farmers to carry a burden that is now a province-wide challenge.

Lifting the DMA does not mean we are dropping our guard. Instead, we are moving toward a more modern, unified approach. We are currently developing a country-wide movement control protocol for all cloven-hoofed animals to ensure that every province adheres to the same rigorous standards. By publishing this rescission in the Government Gazette, we will be allowing our KZN farmers to move forward under a single, clear set of rules that protects both their livelihoods and our national agricultural integrity.

Latest Update Vaccine procurement and Vaccination

We have moved aggressively to secure a world-class vaccine pipeline, ensuring that our provinces have the necessary resources to protect the national herd.

To date, we have received 6 million doses of FMD vaccines, with a clear roadmap for millions more to follow:

Argentina (Biogénesis Bagó): We have received 2.5 million doses of high-potency vaccine secured through our deepening biosecurity alliance with Argentina.

Turkey (Dollvet): We have received 3.5 million doses total from Turkey, which includes a batch of 1.5 million doses followed by an additional 2 million doses delivered in April 2026.

Incoming and planned supply: An additional 4 million doses from Dollvet are currently in transit and are expected to arrive in South Africa by mid-May 2026. Following our recent ministerial mission to Argentina, the import process for a further 5 million doses of Biogénesis Bagó vaccine is currently underway and they will arrive shortly.

This constant flow of vaccines is what allows our provincial teams and our private sector partners to maintain their momentum as we work toward our goal of vaccinating 80% of the national herd by the end of the year.

I would like to commend our provincial teams who are working tirelessly to expand our vaccination footprint. Of the 6 million vaccine doses of FMD vaccines procured, we have successfully distributed 5 229 966 doses throughout the country.

As of 23 April 2026, we have vaccinated over 2.5 million animals (2 590 016) animals across South Africa – this is in the three months since the start of our large-scale acquisition of vaccines.

The breakdown of cattle vaccinated per province is as follows: KwaZulu-Natal 766 508 animals; Free State 446 527; Eastern Cape 376 122; Mpumalanga 233 510; North West 188 073 animals; Gauteng 184 036 animals; Limpopo 183 770; Western Cape 164 474; and the Northern Cape 46 996 animals.

This risk-based approach takes into consideration the highly susceptible animal type, their concentration and their numbers. For this reason, the Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape are allocated a higher proportion of the vaccines.

KwaZulu-Natal has allocated 250 thousand doses to the Milk Producers Organisation (MPO) and we have now allocated another 100 thousand doses.

The Free State vaccinated all the dairies on their records and have further requested the MPO to provide the details of any dairy that has not been vaccinated. The Western Cape has attended to all the major dairies and the Eastern Cape has provided the MPO with over 78 000 doses already. These figures demonstrate that our risk-based approach is working, with the highest number of vaccinations achieved in provinces like KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State, where the concentration of susceptible livestock is greatest. To maintain this pace, we are currently in the process of recruiting 358 additional Animal Health Technicians to support these provincial rollouts. The RIMS will also employ 20 Animal Health Technicians on a one-year contract.

To enhance our diagnostic capacity, two private laboratories in KwaZulu Natal and the Western Cape are in the process of being accredited for diagnostic testing which will significantly reduce the pressure on the state system and improve turnaround times.

Securing the national herd

Let's stand back for a minute and consider the ongoing story of protecting our national herd. It is a story not just of budgets and vaccines, but of a massive, coordinated shield we are building around the livelihoods of our farmers, protecting our future and the food security of every South African household.

With our first batches of vaccine procurement from Biogénesis Bagó and Dollvet, we have already invested R238.2 million in this War. As we move into the next critical phase, our projected expenditure on vaccines from our two international suppliers will increase to over R644.5 million. This excludes the R72 million spent last year on BVI vaccines from Botswana for 900 000 doses – of which the MPO bought 50 000 doses, RMIS 600 000 doses and the Limpopo, the Free State and Mpumalanga took the initiative to buy and use their own vaccine stocks to protect their local farmers.

Locally, our own vaccine production story is unfolding. On 6 February 2026, the ARC released 12 900 doses of its pentavalent vaccine. This marked the first time a locally produced vaccine was deployed in dealing with the outbreak since the production facility was decommissioned in 2005/2006. These doses were used in various provinces across the country.

When you add all these efforts together, the numbers tell a powerful story - to date, more than 4.5 million cattle have been part of our vaccination programme.

Behind every one of those animals is a farmer, a family, and a community whose future is more secure today than it was yesterday.

This is a significant investment of public funds, and it reflects the gravity with which we treat the health of our livestock.

Our local vaccine story

As mentioned, the ARC released 12 900 doses of its pentavalent vaccine in February. These doses were distributed to various provinces across the country. The entity made a commitment to prepare SAT 2 monovalent doses at a rate of 20 000 per week from end of March 2026 from the portable system installed late 2025. These doses were meant for targeted application in KwaZulu Natal, as the province was declared the epicentre of the disease in January 2026, primarily being driven by a SAT 2 strain of the virus. At the end of April 2026, 80 000 doses of the monovalent vaccine have been prepared and will be deployed for emergency situations where SAT 2 is the circulating strain.

These milestones are evidence that even though the production environment remains constrained, the human capacity development efforts over the years have begun to yield results and that rebuilding of local production capacity is indeed underway.

Owing to the evolving epidemiological situation of the outbreak, and in line with the recommendations from the Ministerial Task Team (MTT), the ARC has pivoted from preparation of SAT 2 monovalent to trivalent (SAT 1, 2 & 3) vaccines from the same portable system.

The country is currently dealing with multiple strains in circulation, and the trivalent vaccine is considered the most suitable weapon to meet the requirements in the field.

The change presented additional complexities due to the more complex biological processes involved, which also required adjustment of the timelines.

A very stringent target has been set, and the production team is doing everything possible within a highly constrained environment to adhere to the monthly production schedule of approximately 20 000 doses monthly by the end of May 2026.

While the country continues to import a high number of FMD vaccines from various countries, the restoration of local production capacity is well underway. A 1,000-litre vaccine production fermenter has been procured, and the current production capacity will increase from 20 000 to 200 000 per production cycle.

Commitment

As a government and a department, we are committed to staying on our promised path to regaining FMD-Free status with vaccination.

Whether you are a commercial producer using the new Routine Vaccination Scheme, or a communal farmer covered by our national rollout, please know that your voice has been heard. The journey ahead is long, but for the first time in years, we have a clear, scientific, and heartfelt plan to protect our herds.

By bringing home the best scientific strategies and vaccines from our partners in South America and reviving our local vaccine production, we are ensuring that our farmers are never again left to fight this battle alone.

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