

# The Farmers' Chronicles

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## South Africa's Locally Produced Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Vaccine: A Game-Changer For Farmers and The Livestock Sector

A locally produced Foot and mouth disease (FMD) vaccine is good news for farmers and the livestock industry in South Africa. Since FMD broke out in South Africa over the past few years, farmers have had to deal with challenges caused by this highly contagious disease that affects all kinds of cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep and goats.

In addition to threatening the health of the herd, FMD also poses a threat to the economic sustainability of farmers' businesses through reduced access to markets, reduced farm income and increased reliance on expensive imports and/or food aid.

On Friday, 6 February 2026, at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Campus, South Africa's first locally produced FMD vaccine in over 20 years was launched. Dr Faith Betta, a scientist working at the ARC's Transboundary Animal Diseases Campus, stated: "We have been trying to get here for years.

This is the first time since 2005 that we have shipped a vaccine from this facility." When asked why it took so long to produce an FMD vaccine, Dr Betta replied: "The reason for this delay is because the facility where we conduct vaccine manufacturing is over 100 years old.





Furthermore, the vaccine technology used in the past was outdated." As a result of this, the old infrastructure did not produce sufficient amounts of vaccines to meet national demands. To address these challenges, ARC scientists researched to find the different strains of the virus that existed in the field. These viruses were then modified for vaccine production, and the resulting vaccines underwent rigorous testing to ensure that they provided efficacy, i.e., protecting animals and ensuring long-term immunity.

Dr Betta emphasised that the production of such vaccines is strictly regulated and that compliance with world-standard regulations requires considerable time. In contrast to previously produced FMD vaccines that only protected against one or two strains of the virus, this newly developed multivalent FMD vaccine protects against three predominant strains (SAT 1, SAT 2 and SAT 3) found in South Africa. By using local expertise and infrastructure, ARC scientists and technical experts developed, tested and produced the vaccine to meet the stringent quality, safety and efficacy standards necessary for use in animal disease control programmes. The vaccine has been officially registered as a stock remedy under the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds and Agricultural Remedies Act, 1947 (Act No. 36 for 1947) (Registration Number G1944), and is a major step forward for South Africa in strengthening its biosecurity and animal disease preparedness capabilities.

The launch of a locally developed FMD vaccine represents a significant investment in the country's ability to prevent, manage and reduce the impacts of transboundary animal diseases. The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, commended the scientists at the ARC for achieving this milestone and called it a testament to South African innovation and commitment to animal agriculture. The minister recognised the challenges that farmers have experienced as a direct result of FMD outbreaks on their farms and livestock operations and reiterated that the national Department of Agriculture will continue to implement coordinated vaccination campaigns, enhance surveillance activities, and enforce strict biosecurity measures to bring the disease under control.

Minister Steenhuisen's comments reinforce the government's commitment to protect farmers, their livestock, and the overall agricultural economy alike. To farmers, the locally produced FMD vaccine is more than just a scientific achievement, it is a valuable tool which can be used to protect their herds from disease, increase their productivity, and ultimately safeguard their livelihoods. With reliable access to vaccines, farmers are able to better plan their vaccinations, decrease the risk of outbreaks, and maintain both domestic and international market access. Healthy herds also mean healthy food supplies for consumers in terms of safe and affordable animal-derived products. A farmer in Limpopo or Mpumalanga, who had an FMD outbreak on his/her farm last year, or currently,



now has access to the vaccine and can rapidly take steps to protect their livestock and ensure that their business remains operational and uninterrupted. This is the kind of tangible advantage that demonstrates the value of this development. National and provincial governments have been actively involved in supporting the implementation of this initiative.

Funding for research, as well as coordination of vaccination campaigns, will enable the vaccines to be distributed quickly and efficiently to high-risk areas. At the provincial level, provincial veterinary services collaborate with national teams to deliver vaccines to farmers, particularly those operating in regions known to be susceptible to FMD outbreaks. This collaboration supports the containment of the disease and increases the confidence levels of producers within the livestock sector. By providing both the scientific expertise and a comprehensive national strategy to support the management of FMD, South Africa is moving from a reactive to a proactive approach to managing this disease.

Today, vaccination campaigns and biosecurity measures serve as the foundation of disease control, while historically the primary response to an FMD outbreak was to vaccinate after an outbreak had occurred. A new production facility designed by the ARC will strengthen South Africa's ability to manufacture vaccines. This new facility will improve the speed at which vaccines are manufactured; it will also promote the country's independence to

produce vaccines and assist with the country's preparation. South Africa is anticipating an increase of tens of thousands of vaccinations per week. The increased production of vaccines will provide ongoing protection of livestock throughout the country. South Africa's success in developing a locally produced FMD vaccine is the result of investment, cooperation and innovation. The rollout of the locally produced FMD vaccine demonstrates South Africa's agricultural and scientific capabilities. It shows how, through the combination of expertise, resources and commitment, South Africa can achieve great things. The first locally produced batch of South Africa's FMD vaccine since the early 2000s is a significant milestone. It signifies a return to national control over the manufacturing of the vaccine, strengthening the country's preparedness against diseases and assisting farmers in protecting their herds.

Beyond science, this development of South Africa's first locally produced FMD vaccine is a crucial national resource which will help create a strong, competitive and sustainable agricultural sector. To farmers, stakeholders and consumers alike, the message is clear: South Africa is committed to combating FMD, protecting the country's livestock and ensuring the stability of the country's food systems. With the support of the ARC scientists, government programmes and local expertise, South Africa is as well-equipped as it has ever been to address animal health issues and protect the long-term viability of the country's agriculture.