

The Farmers' Chronicles

By: Prince Mtsweni



From Crisis to Control: The Arrival of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Vaccines Offers Relief for South African Livestock Producers

Since late 2025, South African farmers have been living in a state of extreme uncertainty. Movement restrictions, loss of income, market disruption, and the constant threat of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) spread across the country, have placed a significant burden on livestock producers and their families.

For many, the question is simple: When will this end? That day began on 21 February 2026, when the Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, welcomed a shipment of one million high potency FMD vaccines at OR Tambo International Airport.

The shipment represents a major transition in the national response to FMD; from reactive management of outbreaks under duress to proactive control of the disease at large scale and sets the stage for recovery in the livestock sector. Foot and mouth disease is an extremely infectious animal disease, primarily affecting animals with cloven hooves including cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. The virus is transmitted via direct contact, contamination of equipment, and the unregulated movement of animals.

Once established within an area, the effects of FMD are immediate and devastating, resulting in rapid production declines, closure of markets



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



A NATION
THAT WORKS FOR ALL



restricted animal movements and considerable economic hardship for farm households. During the last few months, FMD outbreaks have occurred in every province in South Africa. Vaccinations were already underway in certain affected provinces, however, due to constrained availability of vaccines, the roll-out was less rapid than required by farmers. The shipment of one million vaccine doses marked a new reality.

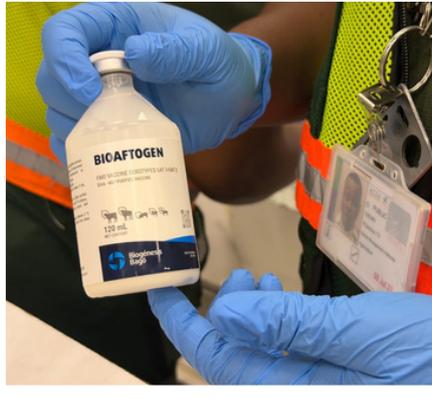
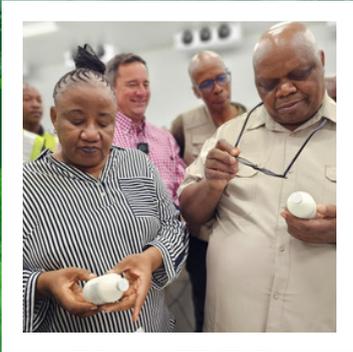
"With this delivery we will be able to expand the level of protection in our priority provinces and stabilise the livestock sector," emphasised Minister Steenhuisen, highlighting both the urgency of speed of delivery and breadth of coverage required to break the chain of transmission. For farmers in the field, it provides the opportunity for accelerated levels of protection to be delivered to more herds, and ultimately restore confidence in the livestock sector.

The one million doses of vaccines received in South Africa represent the first delivery from an international supply pipeline, which includes deliveries from Biogénesis Bagó in Argentina, Botswana and Turkey. By the end of March 2026, it is anticipated that more than five million vaccine doses will have entered South Africa through these international partnerships. In addition to improving access to vaccines, the South African government is also increasing domestic vaccine production to provide long-term support for disease control.

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) has indicated that they plan to produce 20 000 vaccine doses per week locally, with a view to scaling this up to 200 000 vaccine doses per week by 2027. This increased capacity will enable South Africa to respond more quickly and effectively to future animal health threats. With enhanced availability of vaccines, the focus of South Africa's strategy is shifting from a localised response to individual outbreaks, to suppression of the virus at a larger geographic scale, specifically in areas identified as high risk.

A risk-based approach to vaccination is being implemented to ensure that those areas that are most severely impacted are vaccinated first, and then structured programmes are being developed and rolled out nationally.

The allocation of the initial one million doses of vaccines is being distributed across all nine provinces, with KwaZulu-Natal and Free State each receiving 200,000 doses, Eastern Cape receiving 150 000 doses, Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo each receiving 100 000 doses, Gauteng receiving 70,000 doses, Northern Cape receiving 50,000 doses, and Western Cape receiving 30,000 doses. This staged distribution allows for the delivery of vaccines to the areas experiencing the greatest number of outbreaks first, while providing for expanded protection of the remaining provinces as additional shipments of vaccine become available. While vaccination is a powerful tool against FMD, it alone is insufficient to achieve



effective control of the disease. Authorities emphasise that the successful control of FMD requires a combination of vaccination, compliance with biosecurity protocols, control of animal movement, and prompt reporting of potential outbreaks. Therefore, farmers are encouraged to adhere to quarantine requirements, apply for and utilise movement permits, maintain optimal on-farm hygiene and biosecurity practices, and promptly report any suspected cases to veterinary authorities.

Government acknowledges the extreme pressure that farmers have been under since the beginning of the outbreak. However, Government also cautions that any unauthorised movement of animals, concealment of infections, or intentional non-compliance with regulations and guidelines, creates undue risk to neighbouring farms and the livestock sector as a whole. Compliance with the rules will be enforced where necessary, but the focus will remain on mutual responsibility and cooperation.

The dairy industry has perhaps been the most severely impacted by the outbreak, with severe reductions in milk production, disruptions to supply chains, and significant financial hardship. To recognise the impact of the outbreak on the dairy industry, Minister Steenhuisen will travel to Mooi River in KwaZulu-Natal on 27 February to vaccinate dairy cattle along with veterinarians and farmers. This visit is the practical start of recovery at farm level for each vaccinated herd.

As such, it means that farmers' livelihoods are becoming stable again, wages are being paid to farmworkers, and safe products are once again available to consumers. Additionally, it reaffirms the strong interrelationship between animal health, food security and rural livelihoods. The national Department of Agriculture has set up a dedicated Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Control Centre to strengthen support and communication to farmers. From this centre, farmers will have access to professional advice and current and accurate information which will assist with risk management on their farms.

Advice on identifying symptoms of FMD, how to implement movement restrictions and obtaining permits, and information on availability and scheduling of vaccines as well as how to apply effective bio-security practices, are all provided by the centre. Farmers may contact the FMD Control Centre via the call-free number, 0860 246 640. Continued early reporting and informed action are still crucial to limiting the spread of the disease and protecting livelihoods.

The country is slowly transitioning from crisis management to controlling Foot and mouth disease. Vaccines are arriving, systems are scaling up and long-term capacity is being built. Ultimately, however, the success of the country's efforts is dependent upon what occurs on every farm, every day. In short, the message to the livestock sector is quite simple: Vaccination, compliance and early reporting are not simply regulatory requirements;



they are acts of protection for families, farmworkers and rural communities. With every responsible decision made on a farm, the country is taking one step closer to recovery. In this national battle against FMD, every farmer counts, and every vaccinated animal is assisting in securing the future of South African agriculture.

FMD Control Centre Call-Free number, 0860 246 640.