

The Farmers' Chronicles

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Standing Together to Defeat FMD: Minister Steenhuisen's Call to South Africa's Livestock Sector

For many livestock farmers, the past few months have brought sleepless nights, difficult decisions, and growing uncertainty. The outbreak of Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is not just a national crisis; it is a deeply personal one. It threatens years of hard work, carefully built herds, and the livelihoods of families who depend on them every day.

Recognising the severity of the situation, the State has officially declared the outbreak a national disaster under the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002). This step allows for a faster, more coordinated response and ensures that the necessary resources can be directed where they are

needed most. It sends a clear message that this is a serious challenge, and that Government is fully committed to standing with farmers and protecting the sector. At the centre of this response is Minister John Steenhuisen, who has placed farmers at the heart of the national effort. His message has been clear: Government understands what farmers are going through, and it is acting with urgency.

However, success will depend on all of us working together. He has spoken directly to farmers, acknowledging the pressure they are under. For many, livestock is more than a business. It is a legacy built over generations. It represents pride, identity and survival.



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The impact of FMD, from movement restrictions to market disruptions, has made an already demanding sector even more difficult to navigate. "I know what you are going through, and I want you to know that Government is standing with you," he said. Nevertheless, this is not only a message of support; it is also a call to act. A key part of the response is the rapid scaling up of vaccination. South Africa has already received initial shipments of FMD vaccines funded by the government, with more expected to arrive as the fight intensifies.

This growing supply is enabling a broader rollout, especially in affected and high-risk areas to contain the spread of the disease. Vaccination is at the heart of the country's plan to recover and return to FMD-free status. It is the most effective way to protect the national herd and restore confidence in the livestock sector.

On the ground, this work is being conducted by state veterinarians, private veterinarians and animal health technicians. These teams of professionals are working long hours, often in tough conditions, moving from farm to farm to ensure that animals are vaccinated and protected. From communal areas to commercial operations, their actions send a clear message: no farmer is being left behind. Minister Steenhuisen has reinforced this in every engagement: Every herd matters, regardless of size or location.

Each animal contributes to the strength of the national herd and to the livelihoods of the people who depend on it. "Our duty is to protect all farmers. Every herd must be protected," he said. While vaccination is crucial, it will not succeed on its own. Farmers have a vital role to play in strengthening biosecurity on their farms. Limiting unnecessary movement of animals, controlling access to farms, disinfecting vehicles and equipment, and reporting any signs of disease early are essential steps in stopping the spread. "Government cannot win this fight alone," the minister emphasised. "We need every farmer to do their part."

These are not small actions; they are the first line of defence. Without strong biosecurity, the risk of transmission remains high, even as vaccination efforts continue to expand. At the same time, the minister has called for unity across the entire livestock sector. FMD does not affect one group alone, it cuts across provinces, production systems and scales of farming. From small-scale farmers to large commercial producers, everyone is affected.

"This is a shared challenge, and it requires a shared response," he said. Unity means working together, sharing information, and supporting one another. It means recognising that the actions of one farmer can affect many others. It also means trusting the systems in place and committing to a common goal. The road to recovery will take time. Restoring South Africa's FMD-free status will require discipline,



consistency and continued cooperation. However, there is a clear path forward. With the national disaster declaration strengthening the response, vaccines arriving, and more on the way, and with veterinary teams working tirelessly on the ground, the country is actively pushing back against the outbreak. Now is the time for the sector to stand together. Protect your herd. Strengthen your biosecurity. Stand together with those on the ground. Because defeating FMD is not the task of one, but the shared responsibility of all.

