

FMD OUTBREAK

Concern over cattle movement ban

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KWAZULU-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) chief executive Sandy la Marque said members were extremely concerned about the significant economic and social impact of the ban on the movement of cattle in the province.

She was commenting after Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development Minister Thoko Didiza, announced last week that the ban would remain in place due to the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak.

Didiza said 11 new cases of FMD in KZN had been confirmed by a laboratory since the outbreak began in the province. She said five cases were reported in KZN, five in the Free State and one in Gauteng in the first week of the ban on the movement of cattle in South Africa.

Didiza said this brought the total number of infected properties to 127.

"These new cases were probably already on the farms at the time when the standstill was initiated, and some are neighbours of already-infected properties with contiguous spread. Given the incubation period and the delay in showing clinical signs, the effect of the standstill will be better appreciated after two weeks."

La Marque said since May 2021, livestock owners in the KZN foot-and-mouth disaster management area had seen their business effectively halted.

"With the national lockdown (ban on movement), this now includes all cattle owners. While it is critical to take effective steps to stop this disease, it is essential that all relevant authorities are fully committed to playing their roles, for example: clamping down on any illegal movement of cattle, holding effective roadblocks, ensuring that animal health and associated livestock practices are upheld to the highest standards.

"Simultaneously, livestock owners must ensure that biosecurity is of a high standard and contribute to the economy through quality production

that can be traced to the source."

Gerhard Schutte, chief executive of the Red Meat Producers' Organisation, said the ban was heavily affecting the value chain.

"However, it is a controlled disease, the government has a turnaround strategy and we will definitely support it to turn this around. We are of the opinion that we should relook at our status – to be a country with vaccination. We should also manufacture our vaccines in South Africa," he said.

Didiza said the department regretted the economic impact of the disease on farming enterprises.

"This decision was not taken lightly, the medium-to-long-term impact on the livestock industry was at the centre of the decision. In the past week we received mixed messages, those of support and those criticising the decision. By far the majority of messages were those of support, and we thank the industry."

Didiza said since the standstill was instituted the past week, her team had met with the premiers and executives of KZN and the Free State with the aim of heightening awareness of FMD and soliciting support from other role-players.

"Veterinary services continue to engage, both internally and with stakeholders. Following public reports of suspicion, epidemiological investigations were conducted at 28 properties, and samples were collected. Of these, none came back positive.

"However, routine surveillance in and around infected areas and properties continued in the past week, with over 39 properties having been visited in the Free State and five testing positive."

Didiza added that vaccination at affected properties continued during the past week, with 19 000 cattle vaccinated in Gauteng, 26 073 in Mpumalanga and 2 500 in KwaZulu-Natal.

"Considering the above information, the ban on the movement of cattle will remain in place, and this status will again be considered at the end of week two of the standstill."