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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen outlines the national strategy on Foot and mouth disease containment

Good morning to members of the media, our social partners, and most importantly, our farmers.

Today, I address you with a clear roadmap for the protection of our national livestock herd and the restoration of South Africa's international standing in the agricultural sector. Since losing our Foot and mouth disease (FMD) free status in 2019, our farmers have faced unprecedented challenges.

I have received many pleas for help - from commercial to communal farmers, who have borne the heavy burden of the recent FMD outbreaks in the country. We see your struggles. We understand the financial and emotional toll that the outbreaks have had on your families and your livelihoods. We remain deeply sympathetic to the hardships you have endured, however I want to assure you today that we have a plan that is both realistically achievable and technically sound.

I must be frank with the nation: achieving FMD-free status is a monumental task that will not happen overnight. Our strategy will be phased over ten years, beginning with stabilisation and consolidation, before moving toward the eventual withdrawal of vaccination and final recognition of national freedom through vaccination by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). This is a long-term commitment to the health of our economy and the security of our food supply. I need to emphasise that vaccination is not a silver bullet to eradicate or manage this disease. It is merely one of the tools that can and should be used to combat FMD.

At the AFASA Leadership and Strategic Partnership Conference in November, I announced this initiative of vaccinating the national herd – starting with those areas where the biggest and most severe cases of FMD has occurred. These areas are identified through a scientific process also referred to as a heatmap. This is why it is



important that outbreaks are reported to ensure that we know where the biggest areas of concern is. The Ministerial Advisory Task Team on Animal Disease Prevention and Control, led by Dr Emily Mogajane was tasked with translating the vision of “FMD Free through Vaccination” into a high-impact, actionable strategy.

This task team brings together the nation’s foremost authorities in veterinary science, biosecurity policy, and livestock management to ensure a resilient and secure agricultural economy.

Representing the government:

Dr Emily Mogajane - Chief Director: Biosecurity Coordination (Chairperson and convener)

Dr Botlhe Modisane - Chief Director: Animal Health and Production, DoA

Dr Nomsa Mnisi - Director: Biosecurity Support Services DoA

Dr Themba Sikhakhane - Chief Director: Veterinary Services, KwaZulu-Natal

Dr Bheki Cele - Chief Director: Veterinary Services, Mpumalanga

Dr Wynton Rabolao - Director: Veterinary Services, Gauteng

Dr Baratang Lubisi - Research Team Manager, ARC

Dr Moses Mabunda - Director: Veterinary Services, Limpopo

Dr Marietta Swanepoel - Deputy Director: Secretariat Support

Dr Oseke Ngoveni - State Secretariat Support

Representing the private sector, we have the following specialists to provide technical depth across the entire value chain:

Prof. Dietmar Holm - University of Pretoria, Bovine Herd Health (Academic/Beef)

Dr Dirk Verwoerd - Specialist in infectious diseases of intensive production systems, with

emphasis on vaccine development, surveillance, and diagnostics

Dr Jacque Marais - Dairy industry

Dr Anthony Davis - Milk processors

Dr Adriaan Olivier - Ostrich industry

Dr Amanda Botes - Specialist in FMD and African Swine Fever (ASF) diagnostics and molecular epidemiology

Dr Mark Chimes - Dairy, Chairperson of the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Steering Committee

Dr Pieter Evans - Specialist in eradication of PRRS and ASF outbreak management

Dr Shaun Morris - Feedlot Specialist

Dr Baty Dungu - Member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Scientific Commission, African Union Pan African Veterinary Vaccine Centre (AU PANVAC) Steering

Committee, and African Union – InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) expert

panel on animal health and disease control

Dr Danie Odendaal - Ruminant Veterinarian Specialist

Dr Gerhard Neethling - Export and Abattoir Specialist

Dr Francois Maree - Specialist in vaccine design, testing, and diagnostics and

Dr Livio Heath - Diagnostics, Epidemiology, and International Trade Relations.

To maintain transparency and cross-sector alignment, this task team reports directly to the Value Chain Round-Tables. This structure ensures that every stakeholder - from local producers to international trade partners - is represented in the decision-making process.

A Technically Rigorous Strategy

The strategy we are employing is not a temporary patch; it is a comprehensive control and eradication programme designed to interrupt virus transmission and protect our national herd. It is important to emphasise that the success of this strategy will strongly rely on urgent review of the legislative framework, that has to be adapted to the current emergency situation. Our plan is built on world-class technical principles:

Targeted Vaccination: We are prioritising high-risk zones, with the goal of reaching at least 80% coverage in targeted cattle populations especially the communal areas and up to 100% in feedlots and dairy cows. The objective is to reduce outbreak incidence within 12 months by more than 70% in the high-risk provinces through systematic

vaccination and preserve FMD-free provinces through buffer vaccination and strict movement controls.

High-Quality Vaccines with high-potency will be used during the campaign especially, trivalent vaccines of SAT 1, 2, and 3 currently circulating in South Africa. Partnerships with global leaders like Biogénesis Bagó in Argentina will ensure that we have a reliable supply, with one million doses ready to be sent as soon as the necessary permits are issued. The company indicated that as soon as the permits are issued, they are able to supply the vaccine in the coming two weeks. We are currently preparing the application for authorisation by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) to use an unregistered medicine under Section 21 of Act 101. The application will be filed by Monday. Biogenesis will also be able to supply an additional five million doses by March 2026.

Since the outbreak we have been procuring vaccine from the Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI) and will continue sourcing vaccine from this institute. The BVI and the ARCI will look into the existing memorandum and complement one another to ensure that we reach the maximum vaccine coverage. Last year we received confirmation from the BVI that they can supply us with one million doses per month. Unfortunately, due to the closure of their factory for cleaning purposes they could not deliver on time. The delegation of Botswana was in South Africa yesterday and they have confirmed that they have the bulk antigen of SAT 2. This bulk antigen will be formulated to produce SAT 2 vaccine to be used in areas where SAT 2 is prevalent.

We have also secured the one necessary permit to import Dollivet vaccine from Turkey.

As indicated earlier it will take us some time to contain the disease.

Locally, we are activating a local production line through the ARC and OBP, which will initially produce 20 000 doses per week, scaling up to a capacity of 960 000 doses. The ARC indicated on Monday that they can bring forward their production – which will add 12 000 doses to our vaccine pool by mid-February.

Pirbright Institute – Many calls have been made and assumptions that we have not sent our latest strains to the Pirbright institute, However I can confirm I instructed the ARC to send the field strains to Pirbright as a matter of urgency.

The ARC confirmed they are currently preparing the strains to be sent to the institute.

All FMD vaccines to be used in South Africa will have full antigenic matching at Pirbright against South Africa's current field strains to allow comparison of the various vaccines; this will allow South Africa to select the best vaccines to contribute to the control of this devastating disease.

Enhanced Surveillance & Movement Control: We are strengthening our laboratory network, led by the Agriculture Research Council – Onderstepoort Veterinary Research (ARC-OVR), will work with existing state laboratories to ensure that results are received timeously. We have started with increasing capacity at the OVR. We will implement a digital livestock and traceability system to ensure that animal movements are safe and tracked. Other simplified mechanism will also be looked into. We are currently working with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and RMIS traceability platform to implement the Livestock Identification and Traceability System (LITS) which will enhance our traceability.

With the integration of advanced technology, we are no longer fighting this disease in the dark. Through the Red Meat Industry Services (RMIS) Operational Centre, we now utilise a real-time digital heatmap to track verified cases and suspected outbreaks within a 10km radius. This work is done together with Epidemiologists from SAEHP, using resources from the equine industry.

Outbreaks

It is important to note that the current outbreak started in 2021 when animals moved from Phalaborwa to KwaZulu Natal. The Northern Cape is currently the only province that never reported an outbreak of FMD. Up to date we have vaccinated almost two million animals since the recent outbreaks occurred.

Details of the outbreaks :

SAT2 FMD outbreak in KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga, North West, Gauteng and the Free State;

SAT1 FMD outbreak in KwaZulu Natal;

SAT3 FMD and SAT2 FMD outbreak in the Eastern Cape;

The Western Cape reported one outbreak - there is a targeted active surveillance which commenced in May 2025;

Limpopo had SAT3 FMD outbreaks on 8 properties in 2021 and recently they had three outbreaks.

I want to turn the focus now to what actions we will take in each province.

As already indicated, Kwazulu-Natal, Gauteng, Free State and North West were identified as the hardest hit provinces. Interventions include the immediate mass vaccination across affected districts, that will be repeated within three months – 100% vaccination of feedlots and dairy cows; 90% commercial and 80% of communal animals.

Areas where recurring infections occur like parts of Mpumalanga and Limpopo, where Buffalo farming is increased there will be- biannual campaigns to be launched at these border hotspots and vaccination will continue in the protection zone.

Biannual campaigns will be held in Nkomazi and Bushbuckridge with vaccination of 85% of the communal and 90% of the commercial animals. Joint wildlife surveillance and targeted vaccination near reserves will also be implemented.

Eastern Cape (Moderate–High risk) – Biannual vaccination will take place in hotspots and the establishment of a protection zone will be implemented

In addition, we will increase surveillance in markets and slaughterhouse

A Call for National Support

The success of this strategy relies on the cooperation of every citizen. We need our farmers to work hand-in-hand with state veterinarians, to report clinical signs immediately, and to strictly adhere to movement controls.

I want to make it clear that the detailed plan will be shared with MEC's, provincial veterinarians, Cabinet Ministers and Industry leaders. We will be depending on industry, including private veterinarians together with government to ensure implementation of the plan is executed country wide.

By protecting our national herd, we are protecting our future. I ask for your patience, your partnership, and your unwavering support as we implement this scientifically-backed plan to restore South Africa to its rightful place as a leader in global livestock trade.

Together, we can ensure a resilient and FMD-free South Africa.

END

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