

Biosecurity in SA: Taking up the mantle of accountability

By [Claudi Nortjé](#)

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Over the past three years, numerous foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks rocked FMD-controlled areas, which is quite normal according to Dr Pieter Vervoort, managing director of the National Animal Health Forum (NAHF). However, it is the outbreaks that occur outside of these regulated areas that have cost South Africa its OIE-recognised FMD-free status earlier this year. These outbreaks once again highlight the importance of good biosecurity measures.



Dr Faffa Malan, general manager of RuVASA, the Ruminant Veterinary Association of South Africa, and Andries Wiese, head of Holland Insure's Agri Centre of Excellence.

The true cost of biosecurity challenges

Biosecurity plays a fundamental role in ensuring farmer profitability and food security in South Africa. In order to establish accountability, responsibility and preventative measures in dealing with disease outbreaks, industry role-players gathered at the Protea Fire and Ice Hotel in Pretoria on 15 November 2019 to have an open discussion about the true cost of biosecurity challenges in South Africa.

"The FMD outbreaks are some of the biggest setbacks to hit South Africa's agriculture sector in the last seven to eight years. The latest outbreak, which occurred in a previously established FMD-free zone in the Molemole district of Polokwane, was confirmed on 8 November 2019, with additional cases verified on 9 and 15 November 2019. An investigation has been launched to determine the source of the outbreak. So far, all signs are pointing towards an auction pen, but this has not yet been confirmed," said Dr Vervoort.

Economic impact

According to Dr Vervoort, it is estimated that the FMD outbreak of 2012 cost South Africa R6 billion. The ban on wool and meat exports earlier this year cost the economy R10bn. "If we suffer outbreaks like this every three years, farmers will go out of business. We have to create an environment in which farmers can be profitable," he added.



Pieter Vervoort, managing director of the National Animal Health Forum (NAHF).

The standard response to late detection of disease outbreaks in South Africa comes down to a lack of capacity required to

reinforce control measures and little to no government funding. For South African exporters to truly benefit from the African Continental Free Trade Agreement or any other export channels, both the government and industry role-players will have to take up the mantle of accountability concerning biosecurity.

Traceability and national identification

Dewald Olivier, executive officer of the South African Feedlot Association, reported in May that the implementation of a national identification and traceability system in the livestock sector could cost roughly R200 million and take up to ten years to finalise.

The lack of these national systems leaves disease control, assurance of food safety, agricultural financing and trust between consumers and farmers to hang in the balance, with farmers bearing the brunt of the resulting financial strain.

"Biosecurity has to do with your farm gate, fences and foresight. We have already established the need for a livestock identification and traceability system to determine and trace the location of our livestock. In the meantime, farmers must ensure effective monitoring of their animals and take the necessary precautions when it comes to protecting their farm from outside threats," added Dr Faffa Malan, general manager of the Ruminant Veterinary Association of South Africa (RuVASA).

"Last year's FMD outbreak cost us approximately R1,2 billion in terms of agricultural exports. We are in the process of rebuilding trust between South Africa and African and Middle Eastern countries. However, the problem now lies in the reinstatement of export bans following the latest FMD outbreak. If you cannot supply the export market on a continual basis, they will not readily buy from you," explained Dawie Maree, head of information and marketing at FNB Agriculture.



Gerhard Schutte, CEO of the Red Meat Producers' Organisation (RPO).



Dawie Maree, head of information and marketing at FNB Agriculture.

Effect on the red meat industry

According to the Red Meat Producers' Organisation (RPO), the resulting temporary ban on livestock auctions in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and the North West places a significant financial strain on the livestock industry. "The estimated weekly turnover for inland auction houses in big producing areas is R180 million. This outbreak has a huge impact on farmers' profits, especially on small- and medium-scale farmers that utilise auctions as cash-flow management tools," added Dawie.

Gerhard Schutte, CEO of the RPO, says that the ban is not a long-term solution. "Auctioning in itself is not the problem. The lack of enforced regulation and monitoring at these auctions are the causative factors putting us at risk," concluded Schutte.

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