JYOTHI LALDAS

The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development, Super Zuma, is pushing programmes aimed at addressing the triple threat of inequality, unemployment and poverty, according to the department. The MEC officially launched the Bonsmara Livestock Programme, which intends to improve the genetic make-up of cattle found in rural communities, on July 17 in Phobane under Mthonjaneni Local Municipality in northern KZN. Zuma was accompanied by MEC for Public Works and Human Settlements, KK Nkosi.

According to Zuma, the department had observed that the majority of livestock in KZN were situated in rural areas.

"According to our research, more than 2,8 million cattle are in the hands of our people in rural areas. This number does not include commercial farmers. However, the quality of the cattle is not competitive on platforms such as auction sales.

"But the average selling price of the cattle is R10 000, which means that if we were to sell a portion of our cattle, this would amount to billions of rand. Hence it is important to keep our livestock in good condition," he said.

As part of the communal beef improvement programme, which was intended to bridge the gap between commercial farmers and emerging livestock farmers and boost red meat production in the province, Zuma also handed over two Bonsmara bulls. The livestock programmes were part of the implementation of the provincial livestock strategy, which formed an integral part of the KZN provincial growth strategy.

Zuma added that at an auction held recently in Ladysmith, a Bonsmara bull had set a new South African record of over R4 million, proving that the breed was a significant player in improving the quality of livestock farming in the province.

"The department has identified the red meat cluster as one of the agriculture sector pillars towards the growth and development of the provincial economy," he said.

Zuma said the department's aim with these pillars was to bring about a revolution leading to real transformation in the sector, and to address the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, which affected mainly youth, women and disabled people.

During the launch, he engaged with farmers' associations to create awareness about households' struggle to produce enough food to meet basic food security

KZN Agriculture MEC Super Zuma helps vaccinate livestock during the vaccination drive portion of his visit to Phobane, in the Mthonjaneni Local Municipality. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

He also made mention of departmental programmes that were in place to help communities with planting and cultivating produce, saying that he sought to understand some of the challenges faced by these communities at service-delivery level.

As part of the One Home, One Garden initiative, Zuma also handed over farming implements and seedlings to farmers to help improve food security and eradicate poverty. The eDubeni Dam, established to provide water for livestock and irrigate lands, was also handed over to the community.
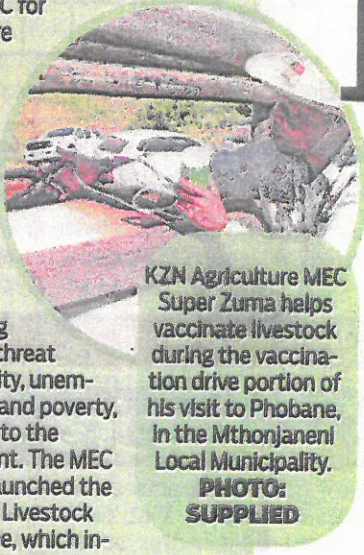
In addition, Zuma visited dip tanks to assess the conditions and monitor the progress of those under construction. At the eDubeni dip tank, Zuma and his team undertook a vaccination drive for livestock and other domestic animals in the area.

This was in an effort to maintain the health of the local livestock and ensure that the farmers and general community understood the importance of vaccinating their animals.