



MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MEC FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT HON. MRS THEMBENI KAMADLOPHA-MTHETHWA DURING THE WELCOMING OF NEW RECRUITS AND THE LAUNCH OF VEHICLES TO BOLSTER FMD VACCINATION DRIVE

VENUE: CEDARA SPORTFIELD, UMNGENI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY
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The Department is pleased to announce the employment of 60 Animal Health Technicians to help boost our administrative ability of teams on the ground who are conducting vaccinations of livestock across the province. This employment will play a huge role in relieving the pressure on the veterinary-led teams on the ground. The so-called 'Nurses' of the vet's world help with vaccinations, work in vet diagnostic labs running samples, and also assist in data collection. The new recruits of Animal Health Technicians (AHTs) under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) will augment the existing teams, having concluded the first phase of vaccinations in the uGu, Harry Gwala, and uMkhanyakude districts.

It's worth noting that in March, we also employed 133 young people as part of the Unemployed Agricultural Graduate Programme (UAGYP) and 109 assistant agricultural practitioners (AAP). This brings to 302 the number of people employed this year alone particularly the youth, with more still to be announced, the Data Capturers and Administration Clerks who will also augment the work already done as part of vaccination efforts.

Our job as a Department is to protect our farmers and our livestock industry. Right now, Foot and Mouth Disease is a serious threat; it is hurting our farmers and our economy. In the past, we waited for outbreaks and then tried to control them. That is not good enough anymore. We must now work to get rid of this disease completely.

We only have 20 teams in the field, which is not enough to vaccinate all the animals on time. Our current Animal Health Technicians are also overworked. To counter this I have approved 60 new Animal Health Technicians through the EPWP programme. This means we will go from 20 teams to 35 teams right away.

These new recruits are hired on 12-month contracts, which can be renewed for up to three years. This intervention is designed to immediately scale our field footprint and ensure that KwaZulu-Natal remains a competitive player in the national and international livestock markets. The final phase of this intervention involves the recruitment of EPWP Data Capturers and Admin Clerks, which will further expand our field presence to 45 teams. These capturers will be responsible for the manual recording of livestock data at dip tanks, ensuring that AHTs remain focused on the technical execution of vaccinations and clinical surveillance.

The Department is also launching 48 vehicles today as part of improving service delivery efforts. Some of these cars will go toward assisting our veterinary-led operations doing vaccinations. It's a daunting task for many of our veterinary services to access dip tanks, which are often situated in difficult terrain. These vehicles, which comprise 4x4 vehicles, will help us effectively navigate those areas and improve service delivery to our farmers.

FMD UPDATE

To date, we have vaccinated over 766 thousand cattle across the province. Our vaccination drive started on 26 February this year in the uGu District, which had been completed with 54 thousand cattle vaccinated. We then went to Harry Gwala District and vaccinated 278 thousand cattle, and there are a few pockets where our veterinary teams did not reach, but our teams will be returning to those areas to ensure no animal is left behind in our first phase. We have also successfully vaccinated 175 thousand cattle in the uMkhanyakude District, and we are currently



at AbaQulusi under Zululand District, where we have concluded vaccinations in Pongola and eDumbe. In that district alone we have so far vaccinated just over 100 thousand cattle.

As per our previous commitments regarding prioritizing the dairy industry, today we can proudly announce that, working in partnership with the industry, we have concluded the vaccination of dairy cattle in the province. You may have seen the statement by the Milk Producers Organisation (MPO) last week, which expressed gratitude that our partnership with them had ensured a successful vaccination of all the dairy cows in each and every district, covering 355 thousand cattle.

I thank you.

