

New FMD outbreak reported

By Jyothi Laldas | 20 March 2024 | 9:29 am

A new outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) has been reported in the Free State. This is according to a statement by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.



Reported on 21 February, the outbreak has now been confirmed on a farm in the Frankfort state veterinary area.

While the source of the outbreak is still unknown, the epidemiological investigation is ongoing, the department said.

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According to the department, livestock undergoing an examination by a private veterinarian exhibited lesions.

Samples were then sent to the Agricultural Research Council's Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Transboundary Animal Diseases Centre, where the outbreak was confirmed.

As a result, the farm where the outbreak appeared had been quarantined and no animals were allowed to enter or leave while livestock inspection and further sampling continued.

Furthermore, nearby farms have also been placed under provisional quarantine, and those farms with cloven hooved livestock will also undergo clinical inspection and testing.

The department said locations and auctions possibly epidemiologically linked to the outbreak were under further investigation to determine the origin and destination of the livestock.

According to the department, including the latest outbreak, South Africa's total outbreaks since April 2022 amounts to 216.

Francois Wilken, President of Free State Agriculture (FSA), said the FMD outbreak had significant financial ramifications for the province's livestock value chain, impacting farmers, agents, auctioneers, feedlots, abattoirs and exporters.

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He emphasised the urgency of investigating an animal traceability and safety system to prevent further risks.

Agbiz chief economist Wandile Sihlobo said the recent outbreaks in South Africa pointed to weaknesses in the country's *biosecurity system*. He said the outbreaks posed a major challenge for South Africa's domestic animal farming sector.

"In 2022, *six of South Africa's nine provinces reported FMD outbreaks*. This was the first time in the country's history that the disease had been spread this wide. The situation remains critical.

"All these outbreaks have had a notable impact on South African agricultural exports and the growth prospects of the sector. For example, South Africa's beef exports for 2022 were down by 12% year-on-year, according to *data* from Trade Map. This decline was primarily due to the temporary closures of various export markets following the outbreak of FMD in South Africa."

Sihlobo said farmers were being hit hard.

“Livestock and poultry account for *roughly half of agriculture’s gross value added*.”

Based on this history and the experiences of the agriculture sector, there is concern that South Africa’s biosecurity breaches signal serious capacity challenges in farm biosecurity measures and the country’s veterinary and related support services (mainly the laboratories) that control the movement of livestock and vaccine production.

“The South African government, organised agriculture and industry bodies should work together closely to address the country’s biosecurity challenges.”