



agriculture,
forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE MINISTER OF
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES DURING
THE RED MEAT INDUSTRY WORKSHOP**

16 MARCH 2017

Programme Director

Leaders of the Red meat Industry

Leaders and members of the various farmer organisations;

South African Feedlot Association

Ladies and gentlemen;

I cannot overemphasise our experiences related to the drought that the red meat industry recently had and the impact on animal production and on agriculture in general. Maize prices as a result of the drought shot sky-high and so did the other inputs including soya and other grains.

Livestock herds had to be managed very carefully, resulting in the need to restock as is the case at this moment. Unfortunately this may result in a shortage of red meat leading to high meat prices.

The problems are not yet over, there is a need to have sufficient feed to enable red meat producers to go through the next winter; here is hope that there will be sufficient stocks.

Past the drought, there was a sudden increase in pests and diseases, the Fall Army worm threatening our capabilities to produce enough grains particularly maize. I am informed that Lumpy Skin disease has now reared its head and threatening some of the recently opened markets for our beef.

We of course know that Livestock products account for more than 40 % of the total value of agricultural output, which is not surprising because nearly 70 % of the agricultural land in SA is only suitable for animal husbandry. Livestock production, furthermore, is partially rural based, contributing significantly to food security and sustainability, in addition to livestock performing a number of social, economic and cultural roles and functions in these areas.

Livestock food products are major contributors to a balanced diet whereas livestock fibre products are significant in the clothing, leather, housing and decorative industries. The success of the livestock sector in terms of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is largely the result of commercialisation and intensification to enhance turnover and off-take. These intensive systems are comparable to the best elsewhere in the world. Finally, significant foreign earnings result from the export of several livestock food and fibre products whereas neighbouring countries benefit from the stabilizing import market of South Africa.

The fact that almost 70 % of the agricultural land allows only animal husbandry implies that livestock production is primarily dependent on natural resources and consequently has a prime responsibility towards the sustainable use of this valuable but vulnerable resource.

It also implies that the only way the vegetation resource can be used for food production is through herbivory. Therefore, a good understanding of the dynamics and interaction between rangeland, pastures, climate and livestock is essential for sustainable livestock farming.

Livestock production from rangeland depends on net fodder production. Unfortunately, the productivity of many rangelands are not high or they have been seriously eroded (to 40-50 % of potential) by inter alia desertification, overgrazing, bush encroachment and the loss of palatable plant species. Should this deterioration be allowed to continue, sustainable livestock production will be jeopardised. The red meat industry is therefore a significant industry that needs support

It is clear that all industries need the commitment of government to help them be competitive in this global environment. Using developed countries as a model, the possibilities to enhance performance are dependent on the working together between government and the private sector in setting goals for their better performance and to improve competitiveness.

To become a world class competitor, local situations as well as all relevant global concerns have to be taken into consideration. Despite issues related to performance of animals, sanitary situations are very significant to the rest of the world and potential buyers. . The situations may vary from the animal disease situation and perceptions related to human health.

A case in point is the use in animals of hormonal growth stimulants, the prohibition of which is already applied in the European Union.

Despite the scientific arguments that may prevail, these prohibition influence animal production practices world-wide as the other less developed countries find themselves having to comply to the same requirements to increase their competitiveness and use the same risk assessments performed by the developed countries.

The same requirements end up being applied in the possible alternative markets leading to countries that continue to ignore this prohibition to be excluded from the markets, irrespective of their level of competitiveness with respect to other quality aspects

Integral to the animal disease situation, is the ability of the country to prevent the spread of animal diseases through controlled movement of animals and animal products embedded in systems of animal identification and traceability. This to a large extent helps the governments to detect early, animal diseases and gives them sufficient time to manage early and limit the spread of these conditions.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been globally recognized as an emerging threat to public health which is linked with high disease and economic burden on people and nations. It is also linked with food, nutrition, livelihood and Sustainable Development Goals.

AMR is a 'One Health' issue, which recognizes that health of humans, animals and ecosystems are interconnected. It needs to be addressed through cross-sectoral coordination among multiple stakeholders.

The momentum to combat AMR has increased. Following the adoption of 'Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance' in 2015, the tripartite alliance of the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and World Organization of Animal Health (OIE) is supporting member states in the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) to be submitted by mid-2017. The issue of AMR has also received global political support at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016.

Historically, some developed countries, particularly of the European Union have been addressing AMR through systematic policy and practice initiatives. The scenario is different in the developing world due to limited awareness and resources as well as weak laws and implementation. In the global context, and more so in the case of the developing world, the human side of the problem received the most attention and the environment part has been neglected. Limited attention has been given to animal aspects.

We have to work hard to highlight and address the animal and environmental aspect of AMR in South Africa and at the international level.

Recognizing the challenges of the developing world, South Africa needs to aim at agreeing to implement strategies that will ensure that AMR is limited and reduced.

It is apparent that the food animal production is potentially a significant contributor to emergence and spread of AMR. Further, the environmental spread of AMR deserves much greater attention both in global guidance and country-level action plans. There are best practices and learnings from developed countries, which we should consider to adopt.

Similar to these above, there is a need to monitor significant areas of food safety including chemical residues in animal products. The development of the laboratory infrastructure to address all aspects of animal production and perform important tests is important. The food safety aspects go far beyond the residue monitoring but to oversight provided by government to verify claims of sanitary safety.

Generally, the control and use of agricultural inputs or to be specific, livestock inputs are important contributors to some of the challenges. Animal welfare is also important and we need to improve on the handling of our animals and all related aspects

These are a few areas which are significant for the global competitiveness of the red meat industry sector. My department has developed relevant strategies to address

significant portions and working hard to update in line with international trends.

In closing, I wish to thank you so much for providing me the opportunity to interact with you today, and take this opportunity to wish you fruitful deliberations.