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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

URGENT CALL FOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT LIVESTOCK IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY SYSTEM (LITS) IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Livestock Identification and Traceability System (LITS-SA), developed by the Department of Agriculture and Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) in collaboration with industry stakeholders over the past six years, has successfully undergone testing in communal areas of several provinces, including Foot and Mouth infested areas. These tests have demonstrated the system's potential to greatly enhance animal health and trade through effective identification and traceability measures.

However, it is important to note that implementation of the LITS-SA in the commercial sector is currently absent and excludes commercial farmers within designated management regions (DMR areas). This gap in implementation raises concerns regarding the equitable and comprehensive coverage of the system.

It is vital to prioritize the widespread implementation of the LITS-SA across all sectors of the livestock industry. This would include expanding the system's reach to encompass commercial farmers.

The successful adoption of the LITS-SA in communal areas and Foot and Mouth infested regions highlights its potential benefits for animal health and trade.

The aforementioned was discussed in a meeting on 30 March 2023 with the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development. Unequivocal commitments were made during the meeting but crucial assignments to government officials remain unfulfilled, raising serious concerns regarding the government's support for implementing LITS. This inaction poses a threat to the livestock sector, both communal and commercial.

The esteemed Biosecurity Task Team has explicitly recommended the implementation of an efficient animal identification and traceability system in South Africa. This urgent recommendation arises from the critical need to proactively prevent and control devastating animal disease outbreaks and facilitate international trade by meeting the indispensable traceability requirements set by global markets.

Given the urgency and significance of this matter, we would like to ask DALRRD and the representatives of government on the LITS-SA committee to fix the current deficiencies as soon as possible. Neglecting to do so would severely disservice the livestock sector and hinder progress.

The LITS-SA, developed over the course of six years, aligns with the OIE Traceability guidelines and SPS World Trade Agreement standards, making it a crucial step toward meeting the Biosecurity Task Team's recommendations. To ensure their products are traceable and meet the required animal health and trade standards, producers are strongly advised to utilize the government-developed Livestock Identification and Traceability System instead of investing in systems that may not comply with necessary guidelines.

Furthermore, effective animal identification and traceability are integral to the RED Meat Vision 2030, which aims to position South Africa's red meat industry as a leading player in local and international markets. By implementing a robust animal identification and traceability system, South Africa can demonstrate its commitment to meeting the necessary standards and guidelines for animal health and trade, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of the RED Meat Vision 2030.

However, the successful implementation of the Livestock Identification and Traceability System hinges on strong government support and resource allocation to ensure comprehensive animal identification and traceability across the nation.

So, as industry stakeholders within the Livestock Identification and Traceability System (LITS-SA), we urgently ask the South African government to honour the commitments made by the minister during our crucial meeting. Swift and unwavering government support is imperative to implement the LITS-SA fully. This must involve the active engagement of the competent authorities responsible for animal health and trade in developing and implementing the system.

South Africa must seize this opportunity to establish an unparalleled livestock identification and traceability system that safeguards animal health, facilitates secure trade, and enhances the nation's global reputation. Failure to act promptly and resolutely on these commitments would be detrimental to our country, its people, and the livestock industry.

Time is of the essence. We urge prioritization and the immediate and efficient implementation of Livestock Identification and Traceability within the livestock sector.

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