

PRESS RELEASE

(for immediate release)

A MAJOR STEP FORWARD FOR STOCK THEFT REPORTING

Stock theft remains one of the biggest issues livestock producers face on a daily basis. Not only does it lead to major losses – there is also an emotional price tag involved when livestock are injured, and years of hard work is lost.

Despite this, not all incidences of stock theft are reported, and procedures are often not followed correctly. Some producers feel the service they receive from their local police station is not satisfactory, an aspect often cited as the reason why stock theft incidences go unreported. Because of this, industry must rely on estimates to determine the economic impact of stock theft on the South African livestock industry.

Dr Frikkie Maré, CEO of the National Red Meat Producers' Organisation (RPO), says the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum is aware of the urgent need to solve this issue. A thorough investigation in this regard has led to the establishment of an effective national reporting system, operated separately from the South African Police Service (SAPS). This project will be managed by the National RPO.

Collaboration with the SAPS

“The goal of the system is to collect information on stock theft and related incidents and then display it on a map. This allows for the identification of stock theft trends and syndicate operations, which information is then shared with the SAPS to promote co-ordinated, effective action. A highly effective national reporting system has been put in place. The Earth Ranger platform is used for processing the information – participating producers can rest assured that their information will be treated as strictly confidential in accordance with the *Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (Act 4 of 2013)* or *Popia*.”

Developed by the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Earth Ranger is a software solution that collects, integrates and displays available historical remote sensing data, and then combines it with field reports. Although it is used mainly for conservation, a number of non-governmental organisations use it for rural security, as there is often a link between poaching and stock theft.

Building on existing successes

According to Louis Wessels, chairperson of the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum, only an estimated 30% of stock theft cases are reported. He is positive about the new system, and calls on all provinces and producers to become involved. Livestock producers in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Free State are already using the Earth Ranger platform to report stock theft and other concerns via Agri Eastern Cape, Agri Western Cape and Free State Agriculture, respectively. The success of this system has been particularly evident in reports from the Eastern Cape where the police have had some excellent results.

A prevention drive launched by the police in the province from 12 to 14 February this year to recover stolen stock, reinforce legislation regarding the branding of stock, and recover illegal firearms has yielded good results. A total of 208 cattle worth R2,8 million, 15 sheep worth R22 500, and 25 goats worth R25 000 were recovered. Two unlicensed firearms, 46 9mm cartridges, and 78 850l of liquor were seized. Fourteen livestock owners were fined R4 250 for not having branded their livestock.

Wessels says the immediate goal is to roll out this reporting system in all provinces. A significant reduction in incidents of livestock theft is expected if everyone were to cooperate. The system is used for identifying hotspots, which simplifies the process of launching preventive actions.

Become involved

Wessels is calling on every producer in South Africa to report stock theft or any other crime on their farms via this system. The reporting process is relatively straightforward and involves sending the appropriate details regarding the incident to 071 515 2011 on WhatsApp. (Producers already making use of their provincial structures for reporting stock theft can continue doing so. All Earth Ranger stock theft data will be aggregated at the end of each month.)

A producer will be required to provide the following information:

- The producer's name and contact number.
- Province where the theft or incident occurred.
- District where it occurred.
- Police station closest to the incident.
- The type of incident that occurred. This includes stock theft, illegal hunting with dogs, illegal hunting by setting traps, stray/roaming animals, poaching, illegal entry of property, attempted stock theft, contraventions of the *Fencing Act, 1963 (Act 31 of 1963)*, arrests for stock theft, as well as wool and mohair theft.
- The exact place the incident occurred.

- How the incident occurred. This includes information such as the vehicles involved, evidence at the scene, shoe prints, and the time the incident took place.
- Information such as photographs that can serve as evidence and the case number provided by the police.

Producers must take note that this system exists to complement the SAPS official stock theft reporting system and does not in any way replace the SAPS system. The system is not mandatory and is an attempt to supplement and strengthen the formal SAPS system to everyone's benefit. Producers are strongly advised to report all stock theft to the SAPS, so that a case number can be obtained.

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