



*HONOURABLE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY & FISHERIES,
MR SENZENI ZOKWANA, MP*

*OPENING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN VETERINARY COUNCIL BUILDING
SPEECH*



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning to you all!

It is my pleasure to address this opening of the South African Veterinary Council. I am especially relieved that the private sector, is stepping up to fill the gap in the veterinary issues and animal health. I want to thank you for taking up this challenge and for inviting me to be part of this great occasion.

The new administration has given the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors a three pronged mandate; namely ensuring food security; job creation and increasing the sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country. To achieve these goals, we need to put certain things in place, and, no doubt, our ability to ensure the safety of our livestock is on top of this agenda.

In August 2014, I have had the opportunity to meet with the Executive Committee of your Council. During the meeting, the committee raised a number of issues of concern to you. I share the same concerns as you.

One of the important issues raised is the implementation of Compulsory Community Service (CCS) for graduating veterinarians. This landmark development is the first in our country. And, when better than to celebrate this milestone as we celebrate 20 years of our democracy?!

In my budget vote speech earlier this year, I commented on the deployment of a 140 newly qualified vets to rural areas – which is another first, the revitalisation of rural infrastructure including animal health clinics, dip tanks and animal handling facilities as some of the priorities relating to the delivery of veterinary services. This was with the recognition of the need to unlock value within livestock, in particular the forty percent owned by black smallholder farmers.

Agriculture has - over the last few years - seen consolidation with the consequent decline in the number of farmers. We have, however, seen as reported by Statistics South Africa, a 58 percent increase in the number of smallholder farmers since the year 2009. It is these farmers who we seek to support and ensure that they succeed and grow to reach commercialisation of their enterprises and to contribute to our ability to feed the nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, these smallholder farmers are far from satisfied with the services they receive. 20 years into our democracy, we still have not ensured that there is universal access to veterinary services! The question I would like to pose to you is, how do we turn this situation around?

As government, we are faced with the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. The effects of these challenges are numerous and include hunger. Sadly, while we were commemorating the World Food Day on 16 October 2014 in Limpopo, we were and are still acutely aware that an estimated 12 to 13 million South Africans go to bed hungry. We have responded to issues of poverty and food insecurity as government through the approval of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy. We are championing this policy with the Department of Social Development. This will see the acceleration of Fetsa Tlala and support programmes offered through the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP).

Access to meat, access to eggs for breakfast, access to fresh milk for morning tea and may add access to fresh fish are but some of the issues that we are about which we see as deliverables from your sector's input. We need to

increase production for household food security and generate surpluses that we can trade with neighbouring countries.

Our economy is beset with immense challenges this year with growth at around 1, 5 percent of GDP and inflation having breached 6 percent. Agriculture's contribution to the GDP needs to grow and it is through the growth and prosperity of the smallholder farmers that we can energise the sector.

In addition to all these goals, our President has also instructed the agriculture sector to create a million jobs by 2030. Your contribution in creating harmonious conditions in the human-animal-environment interface to create these jobs in the livestock and aquaculture space is greatly being anticipated.

We see the role of veterinary team, through provision of primary animal health services, as the first line of defence in ensuring a healthy national herd and flock. Suffice to indicate that most of the disease load is carried by the subsistence and smallholder farmers in the remote areas of South Africa. We remain with the challenge of growing the profession to deal with emerging issues like aqua health in support of the envisaged growth in the aquaculture field.

We developed an Ocean Economy Strategy under Operation Phakisa through which we plan to grow the aquaculture sector from a worth of two billion rand to six billion rand by 2030. I need your input in ensuring that we have requisite veterinary skills to support that growth focus.

We have reviewed the report of the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) on the Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) and we have further requested the OIE to perform the gap analysis for which we still await a response. I would like to invite all stakeholders to join hands and work together to ensure that we strengthen veterinary services in our country. We have, in the last few years, been plagued by disease outbreaks with negative trade consequences.

I am told that our inability to trade from outbreaks of Avian Influenza had cost us around R4 billion. A similar amount had been mentioned with regards to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak of 2011, which has thankfully been resolved. Earlier this year we had our FMD status reinstated. We are expecting the OIE to return to South Africa later this year to inspect our controls for FMD in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. It is my take that at a minimum, this sector should seek to meet minimum standards set by this body.

In my discussions with the Executive Committee of your Council they also raised the issue of dual registration of medicines and the impact on food safety. I will address this issue with my counterpart, Honourable Minister Motsoaledi and that we bring about harmony in the regulation of drugs. I am informed that he held a Summit last week to discuss the challenge of anti-microbial resistance. I do hope that you have taken the opportunity to engage with your technical counterparts to raise the issues that concern you during that Summit and you have also signed the pledge which my department signed. I am of the view that it is with dialogue that we can begin to find each other and make progress on many an issues including how best to preserve and remain with access to antimicrobials that are of benefit to both the human and veterinary fields. My advice is that we look to others who have made headway in these discussions and learn from them in order to quantum leap the learning process and have an appropriate policy response as a country.

I consider this session as a beginning of many interactions. I am well aware that there are many other issues that we need interaction on in your role of providing me with counsel on veterinary and related matters. I look forward to discussions in the future on issues like the second veterinary faculty, transformation of the veterinary profession, game farming and many others.

I thank you.

