

Wool & meat together in KZN

The KwaZulu-Natal branches of the Red Meat Producers' Organisation and the National Wool Growers' Association recently held their annual series of joint regional meetings. **Lloyd Phillips** reports.

Don't forget us, say livestock farmers

The importance of the KwaZulu-Natal livestock farming industry to the economy should not be underestimated by government. Instead, the KZN livestock farming industry should be supported wherever possible.

This is according to KwaZulu-Natal Red Meat Producers' Organisation (KZN RPO).

Executive committee member Tim Ralfe said that 2010 data supplied by the KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (KZN DAEA) showed that there were 2,7 million head of cattle, 922 000 goats and 833 000 sheep in the province.

'WE HAVE A SILENT PARTNER OUT THERE WE HAVE TO TALK TO'

The annual turnover of the province's livestock industry was more than R6 billion – 60% of KwaZulu-Natal agriculture's farm-gate revenue.

"This goes to show that we are not a 'Mickey Mouse' industry," said Ralfe. "We're heavyweights in our provincial

economy and must be recognised as such.

"We must structure ourselves to take this forward. We must also continue to talk, talk, talk and talk again with our local communities, with politicians, with the *amakosi*, and with everyone else who will listen to our story."

According to the KZN RPO, 50% to 55% of the cattle, 74% of the goats and 19% of the sheep in the province belonged to people living on communal land.

"We therefore have a silent partner out there that we have to talk to and this is exactly what the KZN RPO has been doing," said Ralfe.

He added that the KZN DAEA had erected many communal dip-tanks and promoted the formation of dip-tank committees in the communal areas of KZN's 10 district municipalities.

These committees collectively made up the Provincial Livestock Association, which was being built up to be apolitical and to run parallel with the KZN RPO.

The two organisations planned to deal with problems between themselves and then jointly approach government with a single voice, said Ralfe.



ABOVE: Hosting the KZN NWGA meeting at Weston were (from left): Bom Louw (technical advisor, KZN NWGA, Elmarie Badenhorst, (KZN NWGA secretary), Hendrik Botha, (KZN NWGA chairperson), and Paul Tait (principal of Weston Agricultural College).
PHOTOS: LLOYD PHILLIPS

Plans to improve foot-and-mouth controls

The KZN RPO welcomed news that significant steps are finally underway to have South Africa's foot-and-mouth disease- (FMD) free status reinstated.

The country lost this status in early 2011 and has been unable to export any live cloven-hoofed animals or their products since.

Immediately following the discovery of FMD antibodies, the KZN DAEA, which is responsible for livestock disease controls, came under scathing attack from the national livestock industry for allowing provincial FMD controls to fall into disrepair.

"It's galling to learn that since we lost our FMD-free status, Australia has become the world's biggest exporter of SA livestock genetics," said Tim Ralfe, an executive committee member of the KZN RPO.

"This equates to millions, if not billions, of rand that should be coming to South African livestock farmers and not going to Australia."

Ralfe said that the KZN RPO's leadership had met with the World

Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and had been pleased to learn that the OIE had come forward with a plan to assist South Africa to regain its FMD-free status. He added that the department had accepted this plan.

According to Ralfe, the plan required the construction of a 92km east-west fence from the Lubombo Mountains to Manguzi.

It will be patrolled by 91 guards.

The area between the fence and the Mozambique border to the north will be known as the 'Protection Zone' and will contain an estimated 33 000 head of cattle, each marked with a green ear-tag.

"South of the fence-line to the Mkhuzi River will be the High Surveillance Zone containing 115 000 head of cattle," said Ralfe.

"The major problem currently is that the KZN's government veterinary services only have six personnel and three vehicles to monitor these zones for FMD."



ABOVE: Chairperson of the KZN RPO and KZN WGA, Hendrik Botha (middle), with guest speakers Cobus Oosthuizen (CEO of LifeXchange, left) and Andries Wiese (Mutual & Federal group manager: agriculture).

Wool growers hopeful

KZN's wool growers and mutton farmers are hoping that current "fair to favourable" production conditions will persist, or even improve, over the rest of the year.

KZN Wool Growers' Association (KZN WGA) chairperson, Hendrik Botha, pointed out that wool sheep farming remained an integral part of many mixed livestock farming operations in the province.

"The wool sheep's dual purpose and economic

advantage is still a winner due to the current better prices," said Botha. "Wool prices have increased well so far this season, helped by the weak rand. The current price is 7% higher than the same time last season, the highest to date. The mutton price decreased during the year, but is currently 3% higher than last year."

Botha also said that the second edition of *Guidelines for Livestock Farming*, jointly funded by the NWGA and RPO, was now available.

Farmers warn of corridor disease

KwaZulu-Natal cattle farmers want government to begin re-allowing them to vaccinate against corridor disease (CD).

CD can be transmitted to cattle from African buffalo via the brown ear tick, and can achieve an 80% mortality rate in infected cattle.

Vaccinations against CD in livestock were phased out in the first half of the past century.

However, wildlife ranchers are now reportedly seeking to be allowed to begin reintroducing buffalo into the province north of the R69

between Vryheid and Pongola. This area has traditionally been designated buffalo-free as per legislation.

If the ranchers gain government approval, then "the whole of the Pongola River basin and other areas will be opened up to the possibility of CD," said KZN RPO's Tim Ralfe.

"There have been many reports of cattle deaths suspected to have been as a result of CD in areas where buffalo and cattle already co-exist in South Africa," he added.

The KZN RPO has

requested provincial government vets to conduct a scientific study of the extent of the CD problem in KZN.

It is also funding research on *snotsiekte*, which is transmitted to cattle from wildebeest.

"There is a very real threat of conflicts between communal cattle owners and neighbouring game farmers over the impacts of *snotsiekte*," said Ralfe.

The KZN RPO has meanwhile requested that no permits be issued for the reintroduction of African buffalo north of the R69.

Meat imports and branding high on RPO's agenda

During his address this year, KZN RPO chairperson Hendrik Botha said the organisation was pleased to learn that government could soon become much stricter about allowing live animals and red meat products into the country.

These imports have put significant downward pressure on local red meat prices, while the genetics of live animal imports have also threatened the controls and integrity of SA livestock genetics.

"Our research found that government had not been properly conducting the issuing of red meat import permits," said Botha.

He went on to say he had been shocked to learn from SAPS Stock Theft Units that

many animals were still arriving at various sales yards without the legally required brand marks.

"It's 2014. People should be complying with livestock marking legislation by now. It's embarrassing to the red meat industry when these unbranded animals have to be turned away from the sales," said Botha.

He reiterated that it was almost impossible to secure stock theft convictions against stock thieves if recovered animals were not branded with legally recognised marks.

"Sometimes the stolen animals have to be given back to the stock theft suspects, because the legal owner has no way to prove ownership of the animals," said Botha.

Poisoning predators should be 'avoided'

The KZN WGA has urged its members to only use poisons as an absolute last resort to control problem animals.

KZN WGA's technical advisor, Bom Louw, said alternatives to poisoning were available to control damage-causing animals in sheep flocks.

Sheep farmer Neil Viljoen from Loxton in the Karoo had been gathering data from farms around the country, including three in KZN, relating to the various problem animal control measures he is testing, said Louw.

Most of these farms have shown "big increases in their weaning percentages as a result of using Neil's methods", he added.

Viljoen's methods were proactive, targeting specific individual problem animals, rather than a blanket approach.

Louw said that many of the methods would require significant changes from traditional controls.

Traditional control methods still widely used included hunting with dog packs, the hiring of professional problem animal hunters and using cage and gin traps.

"At least we're trying to control problem animals," said Louw.

"It concerns me when I hear that people want to stop farming with sheep because they just can't seem to be able to manage problem animals."