

The importance of immunisation in livestock

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Disease forms an important part of livestock. Farming without understanding how it affects your farm can be disastrous. When your animals are healthy, they deliver better products. Viral diseases are always difficult to cure, because they cannot be treated and their impact is huge.

The best way to prevent viral diseases is through immunisation or vaccination (the animal's body can form antibodies for a disease). The antibodies destroy the virus or bacteria that cause disease. The stronger the animal's immunity, the better chance it has to fight the disease.

The biggest problem in South Africa is that farmers always react when the disease has hit their farms. By then it is too late. If his neighbours find out about the outbreak, they will vaccinate their animals and hope that their livestock does not catch the disease. They will then forget about vaccination the following year. Their animals will then lose their immunity towards that particular disease. This can cause an outbreak on their farms, because the animals have a low immunity.

Vaccines work. The old saying of "prevention is better than cure," has never been truer. This is the strongest weapon for immunisation.

To get the best results in the use of vaccines, you must remember the following:

- Use the correct vaccine
- Use the correct path of administration
- Maintain the cold chain
- Do not use vaccines after their expiry date
- Always work in a sterile environment
- Vaccinate your animals at the correct age
- Animals must be healthy and fit before they can be vaccinated.

Some farmers think that they can save money by not buying vaccines. But the truth is that he can lose a lot more if he does not vaccinate his animals. If he compares the price of his prized bull or any other animals to that of a single dose of a vaccine, he will realise that what he pays for the vaccine is nothing.

Heavy rains increase the number of insects. A high number of insects increases insect-borne diseases. Livestock farmers should be careful of possible diseases in spring and summer. They must protect their animals through vaccination.

If people want to know more about the diseases, they must speak to their local veterinarian, who will give them guidance. Onderstepoort Biological Products and Bayer are also there to offer professional advice. You can contact them at Onderstepoort Biological Products 012 522 1500 or fax 012 522 1591 or Bayer Health Care at 011 921 5870 or fax 011 921 5751. **UM**