

SADC Veterinary Committee to upgrade livestock labs

The SADC Veterinary Laboratory Diagnostic Sub-Committee is working on measures aimed at upgrading livestock laboratories to meet international standards as it seeks to stimulate the trade of livestock products in regional and global markets, an official has said. SADC Veterinary Laboratory Diagnostic Sub-Committee chairman Dr Pious Makaya said trade of livestock products has declined due to widespread diseases among African countries.



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Makaya was speaking during the closing of the annual meeting of SADC Committee for Livestock Health in Harare yesterday. The two-day meeting, attended by 14 SADC member countries representing the departments of livestock was aimed at deliberating viable measures to control animal diseases affecting trade of livestock products.

"The need to put in place management system for ISO 17025 accreditation to upgrade our diagnostic tests for higher specificity and sensitivity and strengthen regional laboratory networking is a key factor for ensuring regional diseases control and accessing international markets for our animals and animal products," said Makaya.

"Our target is to have our laboratories accredited to international standards such as the World Organisation on Animal Health and we want to do this at a regional level. "Zimbabwe is currently not trading its livestock products to other countries due to diseases such as foot and mouth and swine fever, which is seriously affecting the pig sector," said Makaya, who is also Zimbabwe's deputy director (Diagnostics and Research Branch) of the Division of Veterinary Services.

Fears of disease restricting livestock trade

Makaya said the country was failing to export beef after an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Zimbabwe's beef exports to the European Union were stopped in 2001 due to an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The country had an export quota of 45,000 tonnes per year. "Zimbabwe is one of the countries whose livestock is affected by foot and mouth among other countries like Namibia and Mozambique, and this has affected the sector as we are restricted from exporting beef," he said.

Government has since availed funds to help curb the disease. Apart from discussing animal diseases affecting trade, the meeting also focused on building capacity to diagnose diseases. "There is a need to harmonise the diagnostic methods or tools in all the laboratories within the SADC region targeting diseases of economic importance and other diseases, which are important when it comes to trade.

"Once the diseases are completely diagnosed African countries will start to trade without any restrictions," he said. Commenting on the same issue, head of Central Veterinary Laboratory in Mozambique Dr Sarah Acha said trade of livestock was being restricted by fears around the spread of uncontrollable diseases in the region.

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