

UP veterinary science students make a difference

4 March 2016



A group of 125 veterinary science students from the University of Pretoria (UP) – led by Mr Masethe Maime (Chief Animal Health Technician) and Mrs Mmatjie Maime (Extension Advisor) from the North West Provincial Department of Rural, Environment and Agricultural Development – recently went to Makapanstad village in the North West province, where they had the opportunity to gain first-hand experience handling farm animals without the aid of standard animal-handling facilities.

‘Most small-scale/emerging livestock farmers experience low production, mainly as a result of poor animal health and husbandry practices,’ said Dr Khoboso Lehloeny, senior lecturer in the Department of Animal and Wildlife Sciences at UP, who supervised the students' activities. This issue inspired the veterinary science students to join hands and raise awareness among small-scale livestock farmers about the importance of primary animal health care and routine husbandry practices.

‘These animals are solely dependent on us and we hope people take this fact into consideration,’ said Dr Lehloeny. The Department of Rural, Environment and Agricultural Development, in collaboration with UP, encourage farmers in Makapanstad to take measures to ensure acceptable animal health and production. This is achieved through regular visits to the village and neighbouring small-scale farms by a qualified animal technician from the department, who executes regulated animal health activities and renders support services to the State Veterinarian. The farmers are also advised to ‘dip and dose’ their animals to control external and internal parasites. In addition, the animal technician helps farmers to vaccinate their livestock against diseases and collects blood for brucellosis tests.

The students visited four farms in three villages, Norokie, Mmatlhwaela and Lekgolo, where they vaccinated 679 cattle against lumpy skin disease, black quarter, anthrax and botulism. 175 goats were vaccinated against pulpy kidney disease and treated for parasites. The students also dehorned, branded and ear tagged 135 calves and bled 96 breeding cows to test them for brucellosis. Of the four farms visited, only one seemed to have animals with health problems.

Apart from getting practical experience in vaccinating, bleeding, branding and ear tagging animals, the students also had the opportunity to hear about the challenges faced by emerging farmers and to advise where they deemed necessary. The farmers greatly appreciated their assistance.

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