**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1209 / NW1303E**

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES:**

**MR T R MAJOLA (DA) TO ASK THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES**

**QUESTION:**

(1)       Whether his department conducts tests for listeriosis in live animals; if so, (a) what procedures are followed and (b) has there been any additional testing instituted due to the latest listeriosis outbreak;

(2)       (a) what is considered to be a safe level of listeriosis on (i) live animals and (ii) animal products and (b) what standards are used in each case;

(3)       what (a) has been the economic impact of the latest listeriosis outbreak in the agricultural sector and (b) steps have been taken by his department to limit the potential job losses in this regard?                                                           **NW1303E**

**REPLY:**

**(1) Whether his department conducts tests for listeriosis in live animals; if so, (a) what procedures are followed and (b) has there been any additional testing instituted due to the latest listeriosis outbreak;**

Listeriosis is not a disease listed as either a notifiable or controlled in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984). The Department therefore has no official programme for monitoring its occurrence and no tests are conducted on live animals. Listeria monocytogenes is ubiquitous, and it is usually found in soil, water, decaying vegetation, and many farm animals and other domestic and wild animals can harbour the bacterium. The organisms do not normally make animals sick. The listing of the disease is currently limited to human illnesses.

DAFF has introduced additional testing for Listeria on imported mechanically deboned meat (MDM) at the ports of entry.

The Department will however support any industry driven programmes provided it has a clear and scientific plan with the contingency measures outlined should a farm test positive.

**(2) (a) what is considered to be a safe level of listeriosis on (i) live animals and (ii) animal products and (b) what standards are used in each case;**

2 (a) (i) There is no limit for the amount of Listeria monocytogenes in live animals.

2 (a) (ii) There is no limit for the amount of listeria monocytogenes in raw meat.

(b) The standard used is the “Guidelines on the application of general principles of food hygiene to the control of Listeria Monocytogenes in foods (CAC/GL 61 – 2007)” issued by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The enumeration of listeria in food is limited to ready to eat (RTE) products (Processed meats in this case) and not live animals and raw non ready to eat products. It is generally assumed that non ready to eat products (including meat) will not be consumed raw and the cooking process with kill the listeria organism. Listeria is very liable to heat and is destroyed at temperatures around 600C.

The presence of listeria in raw meat at primary processing (abattoirs) and on farms is a process hygiene criteria. This means that its presence indicates inadequate hygiene and therefore the action to be taken is to institute intensive cleaning of the premises. This is different to a food safety criteria as in ready to eat products in which the presence of listeria must be responded to by withdrawal of the food from the food chain.

**(3)       what (a) has been the economic impact of the latest listeriosis outbreak in the agricultural sector and (b) steps have been taken by his department to limit the potential job losses in this regard?**

1. The economic impact of this disease has not been documented in South Africa, however the cost of eradicating the listeriosis would be “substantial”. This is particularly true if the source is water, an abattoir or food processing plant. The quarterly economic overview to be released around June is expected to reflect economic impact the disease had and continue to have in the country. This will be on a range of key economic variables, particularly domestic sales on related products and export sales. The bigger impact is that all the SADC countries (Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana) who buy processed meat from South Africa have banned South African exports affecting the economic performance negatively. The impact on Tiger Brands and Rainbow Foods will be highly negative (as their share price has apparently gone down), including employment, level and pattern of consumption, production and so on. This will be reflected in the next Economic Overview analysis in June 2018, as most of these figures are not yet available.
2. The department has not taken direct steps to limit potential job losses as a result of listeriosis outbreak.However, theDepartment of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries (DAFF) has undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Health; the Department of Trade and Industry to address the outbreak of Listeriosis The outbreak and subsequent spreading of listeriosis contamination will likely not lead to short-term job losses, however, if they end up having to close the factory all together, that will have an impact on jobs.