

# Hope springs in trying year

Patricia Gurubes

It is my privilege to present the annual report for the financial year ending 31 March 2021 on behalf of the Meat Board of Namibia (MBN).

The MBN welcomed Minister Schlettwein's appointment as the new Minister of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform. The Minister is a former executive director of the Ministry and brings a wealth of experience. Our best wishes accompany his term of office. The most important task for the Honourable Minister is to establish a common vision within the meat industry. Without a vision and collaboration, the livestock and meat industry will be seriously impaired.

The year 2020 was eventful, most probably to be remembered for many years to come. It was a year when the country was blessed with good, and in some areas, exceptionally high rainfall that brought hope to regions that had been in dire straits due to little or no rainfall for a prolonged period. However, on the horizon loomed a pandemic that brought many more challenges and uncertainties. Initially, with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, inefficiencies occurred as personnel were locked down, isolated and/or quarantined along the value chains. Fortunately, the meat value chain was one of the few that was probably the least affected, while the MBN was well positioned to weather the Covid-19 storm, due to its stable financial position and strong relationships in the market and with shareholders.

Given the current depressed world economy, as well as the shortage of government finances, scarce financial resources must be made available to implement necessary interventions to stimulate growth in the Namibian meat industry. Honourable Minister, Government must establish an environment where all participants of the value chain can prosper and not only sectors that are "perceived" to create employment in the country. This could be to the detriment of other value chain components.

The MBN held successful seminars on the beef and sheep industry in Windhoek during mid-2020. Seminars were also held north of the veterinary cordon fence in Rundu and Ondangwa. These seminars aimed to obtain inputs of role players to identify areas of growth in the primary production of cattle and sheep. The biggest challenge is, and will remain, to create the ideal environment for producers to recover to previous production levels.

The MBN realises that re-establishing trust between value chain participants is the most important factor to grow the livestock industry. If trust is restored, farmers will reinvest and use available capital to develop farms and the industry. Therefore, given Namibia's livestock pro-

duction decline, priorities must be aligned to stabilise and revive livestock production and access to meat markets to the benefit of all participants.

Economic research by the MBN indicated a N\$1 billion benefit to the cattle export sector in favour of the slaughter sector. One cannot indefinitely erode the one value chain component (producers) to support the subsequent component (abattoirs) – it is just not sustainable. An exception to the rule may be the pork promotion scheme implemented by the Meat Board. Since the scheme's inception on 1 October 2012, the production of pork has increased by 57%. Approximately 45 000 pigs were slaughtered locally during 2020 alone.

Honourable Minister, the livestock and meat industry needs to grow to maintain its position within the Namibian economy. A ten-point plan which the MBN believes will make a difference has been drafted and presented to your office. All stakeholders in the value chain are prepared and have expressed their willingness to assist in implementing the plan. One of the aims is to improve economic growth in the industry to increase the carrying capacity of pastures. The MBN continues to assist initiatives in importing and selling arboricides at cost to producers countrywide. The demand normally exceeds supply with the MBN experiencing some difficulty to source supplies from manufacturers.

The MBN researched specific international markets for Northern Communal Area (NCA) produced beef, sheep and goat meat. There is potential for this meat to be exported to the Middle East and China. The study found that for beef, Bahrain and Qatar are the most lucrative markets, especially with regards to bone-in cuts. China, Kuwait and Qatar would be ideal markets for sheep meat, specifically chilled boneless cuts. The directorate veterinary services (DVS) has been requested to negotiate SPS access to these identified markets.

The meat standards division of the Meat Board continued to establish acceptable minimum standards of Namibian meat. With the strong influence of social media and easy access to information, integrity and compliance will continue to play an increasingly important role in assuring consumers. Adapting to consumers' needs places additional administrative requirements on role players in the respective value chains. The MBN FANMeat and classification teams play indispensable roles in meeting consumer demands regarding animal welfare, antibiotic use and sustainable production. However, it is the responsibility of each role player to ensure that it aligns its practices to the greater good of the consumer. These two divisions successfully underwent external international audits to maintain integrity.

Through successful collaboration with DVS, online services with regards to livestock identification, traceability and trading have been expanded. The motivation was firstly to assist the producer to comply with official livestock identification and traceability requirements, and secondly to reduce the administrative burden of the DVS. The expansion came at an opportune time when human interaction was reduced due to the global coronavirus pandemic. NamLITS online allows producers to perform administrative requirements electronically from the comfort of their own homes instead of visiting DVS or MBN offices. Furthermore, it allows official livestock ear tags



Private contractors and casual workers were hired by the Meat Board and relevant industry stakeholders to assist with VCF repairs.



Two successful seminars on cattle and sheep marketing were held by the Meat Board in Windhoek on 16 and 17 June 2020. Globally, not just in Namibia, the meat industry has been affected by reduced consumer disposable income, a shift in the application of disposable income, a change in meat consumption patterns with the shift from take away food to in-house cooking, the outbreak of animal diseases and the impact of drought.

to be ordered online directly from the Meat Board.

Honourable Minister, as the most important government institution in the livestock and meat industry, DVS is severely hampered by a lack of finances and the slow release of funds. The unfortunate outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the protection zone five years after the previous outbreak, led to DVS sourcing funds to control the FMD outbreak. To assist DVS, representatives of the meat industry provided support in the form of rations for 200 casual staff members performing roadblocks, surveillance and vaccination functions. In addition, support was provided for the acquisition of vaccines, supervision of and equipment at roadblocks, assistance with fence repairs, maintenance and monitoring of the veterinary cordon fence, assistance with repairs to vehicles needed for vaccinations, appointment of private veterinarians to assist DVS with FMD surveillance of affected areas in the NCA as well as the supervision, monitoring and transportation of goods from Windhoek to Rundu.

The support from these institutions in the meat industry once again demonstrates the Namibian spirit of co-operation, especially the assistance of the Livestock Producers Organisation (LPO), which mobilised fencing teams from farmers' associations to repair the VCF.

Honourable Minister, a long-term strategy for secured funds and immediate release thereof must be made available to DVS. Secondly, the uncontrolled movement of livestock across the Namibia-Angola border is of great concern for the prevention and protection of the area north of the VCF. If movement is not controlled, FMD outbreaks will regularly reoccur.

One of the strategic objectives of the MBN is to improve market access. The Meat Board through its NCA regional offices in Ongwediva, Rundu and Katima Mulilo has encouraged livestock producers to ensure that animals are marketed at both abattoirs and auctions. Government, through the MAWLR, has built new abattoirs at Eenhana, Rundu and Outapi, while the Oshakati and Katima Mulilo abattoirs were renovated. All these interventions are aimed at creating diversified marketing opportunities for NCA-produced beef both domestically and for export.

The Ministry requested the Meat Board to commission the Katima Mulilo abattoir on behalf of ZAMCO, a group of producers from the Zambezi region. These efforts were rewarded when DVS issued a certificate of approval for a meat establishment to ZAMCO on 29 June 2020. The abattoir started slaughtering commercial cattle on 29 September 2020. The first shipment of chilled beef in history, and any beef since the 2015 FMD outbreak, was shipped to Windhoek.

Stakeholder engagement is a core element of the MBN strategic plan. Engagement requires explaining the role and functions of the Meat Board to ensure livestock and meat marketing trends are correctly interpreted. Further collaboration takes place through two industry committees established by the MBN, namely the livestock marketing committee and the animal health committee. It will continue to be a major focus of the MBN to deliver benefits to the industry across the red meat supply chain. The MBN gave six veterinary students from the University



The meat standards division, in conjunction with Hygiene Solutions, hosted an abattoir hygiene training session on 3 December 2020 at BH Abattoir in Gobabis for local owners, managers and employees. The main aim of the training was to introduce and create abattoir as well as personal hygiene awareness at C-class level.

of Namibia's (UNAM) school of veterinary medicine a unique opportunity to witness trial slaughtering at the re-commissioned Katima Mulilo abattoir as part of their practical training during clinical rotations. The students had to develop a food safety system fit for regional export.

In addition, the MBN hosts abattoir hygiene training sessions from time to time for abattoir owners, managers and employees. The main aim of training is to introduce and create abattoir as well as personal hygiene awareness at C-class facilities. This is currently a big concern for the industry.

The MBN on behalf of the livestock and meat industry is in the process of introducing levies to provide for long-term contributions towards the financing of essential veterinary services. It became specifically relevant as only the Meat Board, LPO and certain private sector organizations assisted DVS with the implementation of FMD control strategies in the NCA during 2020 while the whole country and other applicable commodities benefitted from speedy reactions to control the FMD outbreak. With the support of the MBN and assistance from producers farming close to the cordon fence, authorities were able to repair the VCF in less than two months.

I wish to conclude by stating that the success of the MBN's future depends on the unselfish contributions of its employees. The Meat Board will continue to invest in their development. The MBN is a well governed and managed organisation, delivering value with levy money it receives from producers and is well positioned to effectively tackle future challenges on behalf of the red meat and livestock industries. We wish to thank employees, producers and all the role players for their support during a trying year.

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