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EPIDEMIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS ON MALIGNANT CATARRHAL FEVER (MCF) IN FARMS AROUND MATOPOS NATIONAL PARK, ZIMBABWE.

BY

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ABSTRACT

Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) is viral diseases that affect cattle and transmitted by wildebeest and this result in great cattle losses in farms close the Matopos national where the cattle and wildebeests share grazing land and water sources. A study was conducted in smallholder and commercial farms close to Matopos National Park to document and establish the trend of occurrence of MCF and its contribution on cattle losses in the smallholder and commercial farming sectors. In addition, the research established the farmer perceptions on the importance, transmission and control of MCF. Information from a total of eight (8) commercial farms was obtained using semi structured questionnaires. Epidemiological data from January 2006 to April 2014 was extracted from records from stock registers of two commercial belonging to Matopos Research (West Acre and Lucydale). A total of 97 cattle owners from smallholder farmer from three (3) villages (Nyumbane, Manzana and Tshonaphansi) were interviewed using the semi structured questionnaires. In the results, MCF showed a seasonal pattern in its occurrence where cattle mortalities were recorded between February and May of 2006 to 2013 with the highest cases losses experienced between March and April of the same years. A few sporadic cases were noted between October and November in the years 2007, 2010 and 2012. MCF was perceived to be the most important disease accounting for 71 % of the deaths in the commercial farms and rated the most important disease responsible for most of the mortalities in Tshonaphansi village. However, cattle owners from Manzana and Nyumbane did not rate MCF among the three most important killer diseases but instead Quarter Evil and Lumpy Skin disease were major causes of cattle losses at their farms. Perceptions by farmers in the commercial sector on transmission, clinical signs and control of MCF were very consistent with the typical of MCF. Farmers from both sectors do not treat clinical cases but instead slaughter the animals for domestic consumption. The seasonality of MCF occurrence is associated with the calving season of wildebeests, it is therefore concluded that the best option in reducing cattle losses to implement a grazing plan that will reduce chances of cattle - wildebeest contact during the wildebeest calving season i.e. November to April in order to reduce transmission to cattle. There are very few cattle owners in Tshonaphansi village, it is therefore a more feasible option for the government to consider resettling them far away from the park instead of erecting two parallel fences 1000 metres apart around the park.