



RMIS Funds Nine New Research Projects to Drive Red Meat Industry Growth

Pretoria, South Africa – Red Meat Industry Services (RMIS) has announced the approval and funding of **nine new research projects**. Each project was developed through RMIS’s Field to Future framework, an industry-informed process to identify the real-world challenges faced by farmers, feedlots, abattoirs, and other value chain stakeholders.

Field to Future also steers RMIS’s broader project portfolio, ensuring that every intervention is relevant, impactful, and fully aligned with the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2030.

“Our research strategy is built on listening,” said Dewald Olivier, CEO of RMIS. “Every project is based on a practical challenge identified by the people who live and work within the red meat sector. This ensures our projects are relevant and positioned to deliver measurable results for the industry we serve.”

Full Overview of RMIS’s Approved 2025 Research Projects

1. Evidence-Based Risk Reduction for FMD Virus Persistence at Slaughter

Research Focus

This project investigates the persistence of the SAT-type Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) virus in cattle post-infection, particularly the risk posed by "carrier" animals during slaughter. It aims to detect, quantify, and eliminate virus persistence in high-risk tissues, guiding science-based revisions to current slaughter regulations.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The research directly supports RMIS’s strategic goals by addressing regulatory inefficiencies that impact competitiveness, trade, and sustainability. It provides scientific evidence to refine deboning, deglanding, and offal disposal requirements, which currently impose blanket restrictions and financial losses on producers.

Value to the Industry

By clarifying the actual risk of virus persistence and transmission, the project will reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens, improve slaughter efficiency, and support international trade. It also enhances food and job security by minimising economic losses in feedlots and across the value chain.

Expected Outcomes

- **Phase 1A:** Determine if deboning is necessary at 15 days post-infection and quantify carrier prevalence
- **Phase 1B:** Identify virus persistence sites in heads, glands, and offal to guide safe trade and policy revision
- **Phase 2:** Develop a serological test to distinguish carriers from recovered animals, enabling pen-side screening
- **Phase 3:** Assess the impact of vaccination on virus clearance

Researcher: University of Pretoria (UP) – Prof Armanda Bastos

Additional funding: Zoetis and UP

2. Estimating the Economic Impact of FMD on the Red Meat Sector

Research Focus

This study aims to quantify the full economic impact of FMD outbreaks across South Africa's red meat value chain. It will assess direct losses to producers, indirect effects on suppliers and processors, and broader macroeconomic consequences including GDP, trade, employment, and income.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The research supports RMIS's strategic goals by providing evidence-based insights that justify investment in biosecurity, coordinated animal health systems, and resilience-building measures. It aligns with the industry's need for data-driven policy and planning to mitigate systemic risks.

Value to the Industry

By revealing the scale and ripple effects of FMD disruptions, the study empowers producers, processors, and policymakers to make informed decisions. It strengthens the case for compensation mechanisms, targeted support, and improved preparedness for future disease shocks.

Expected Outcomes

- Quantified estimates of direct, indirect, and induced economic losses from FMD

- Identification of vulnerabilities in the red meat value chain
- Policy recommendations to enhance disease resilience and market stability
- A modelling framework for evaluating future livestock disease impacts

Researcher: University of the Free State - Dr WA Lombard (Project Leader), Prof Yonas Bahta, Dr H.N. van Niekerk

3. Policing Livestock Theft in Rural South Africa: Community Engagement and Evidence-Based Strategies

Research Focus

This study investigates livestock theft in South Africa, focusing on farmer experiences, recovery rates, and the role of the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum (NSTPF). It aims to understand how farmers perceive and respond to theft, and to evaluate the effectiveness of current prevention and policing strategies.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The research supports the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2020 by addressing a critical threat to rural livelihoods and food security. It contributes to the strategy's emphasis on skills development and rural safety by generating actionable insights into theft prevention and response mechanisms.

Value to the Industry

Livestock theft causes significant economic losses and undermines farmer confidence and safety. This study provides empirical data to inform policy, improve coordination between stakeholders, and strengthen rural security networks. It empowers industry bodies and law enforcement with evidence to refine interventions and enhance recovery rates.

Expected Outcomes

- Insights into farmer perceptions of theft trends and risks
- Evaluation of recovery rates and policing effectiveness
- Documentation of community-level strategies for prevention and response
- Assessment of NSTPF's role and visibility
- Recommendations to improve rural safety and stakeholder collaboration

UNISA – Willie Clack

4. Understanding Farming Approaches and Land Access Systems to Strengthen Transformation Support

Research Focus

This desktop study investigates the farming approaches of emerging livestock farmers in South Africa, with specific reference to the land access systems they operate under - communal and freehold. It aims to understand how these systems influence production practices and the effectiveness of development support programmes.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The research aligns with the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2030 by addressing the transformation and inclusivity goals of the sector. With 40–50% of the national herd in the hands of communal and smallholder farmers, understanding their realities is essential to designing effective support mechanisms that unlock growth and improve productivity.

Value to the Industry

The study provides a foundational baseline for improving transformation initiatives. By identifying governance structures, production systems, pain points, and knowledge gaps, it enables better programme design and implementation. This will help the industry move toward inclusive growth, rural development, and increased competitiveness.

Expected Outcomes

- A baseline review of farming approaches across different land access systems
- Identification of institutional governance impacts on project uptake and sustainability
- Insights into production models and transformation challenges
- Recommendations for tailored support programmes and scalable transformation models
- A decision-support tool for stakeholders and a framework for future field validation

Researcher: OABS – Dr Hamman Oosthuizen (Project Leader), Mr Ryan Newborn, Dr Johan van Rooyen

5. Mapping the South African Red Meat Value Chain for Strategic Growth

Research Focus

This project aims to comprehensively map and update the South African red meat value chain, capturing the full spectrum of stakeholders, production systems, market flows, and governance structures. It addresses the current lack of integrated, up-to-date data that hinders effective planning, transformation, and market access, especially for emerging and communal producers.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The research directly supports the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2030 by enabling data-driven decision-making across key focus areas: animal and public health, inclusive growth, market access, and competitiveness. It provides the analytical foundation to measure progress toward strategic targets such as expanding exports, implementing traceability systems, and integrating 250,000 additional weaner calves into the commercial chain.

Value to the Industry

By delivering a clear, visual framework of the value chain, the study will help identify bottlenecks, risks, and opportunities for value addition. It enhances transparency, supports inclusive market development, and strengthens resilience against regulatory, environmental, and health-related disruptions. The updated map will serve as a strategic tool for industry stakeholders and policymakers.

Expected Outcomes

- A detailed value chain map covering actors, flows, and market linkages
- Economic and market analysis highlighting inefficiencies and competitiveness gaps
- Identification of risks and opportunities for transformation and sustainability
- A final report to guide strategic planning and future interventions

Researcher: OABS – Dr Hamman Oosthuizen

6. Farm-Level Vaccination Planning and National Strategy for the Red Meat Industry

Research Focus

This project investigates the current status of farm-level vaccination and herd health planning across South Africa's red meat sector. It aims to determine how many farmers have written vaccination plans, understand barriers to adoption, and develop practical tools and templates to support structured disease prevention. The study will also

explore electronic systems to enhance planning, monitoring, and reporting, ultimately delivering a phased National Vaccination Strategy.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy The research supports key pillars of the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2030:

- **Animal & Public Health:** Positions vaccination as the cornerstone of biosecurity.
- **Inclusive Growth:** Captures realities of communal and smallholder farmers.
- **Market Access:** Strengthens traceability and certification systems.
- **Competitiveness & Sustainability:** Promotes long-term planning to reduce disease losses and improve productivity.

Value to the Industry

The project will provide RMIS and stakeholders with a clear picture of vaccination planning at farm level, identify gaps, and offer implementable solutions. It will reduce preventable disease losses, improve herd health, and enhance both local production and international market access.

Expected Outcomes

- Assessment of vaccination plan adoption and barriers
- Development of templates and electronic support tools
- Linkage of farm-level planning to national traceability systems
- Delivery of a phased, implementable National Vaccination Strategy

Researcher: VNet – Dr Danie Odendaal

7. Vet Connect: A Digital Veterinary Support Platform for South Africa's Red Meat Sector

Research Focus

This project proposes the development of a scalable, mobile-accessible veterinary decision-support platform designed to assist farmers - especially those in remote, communal, and small-scale systems - with timely and accurate disease diagnosis. The platform will offer symptom identification, triage advice, and escalation pathways via machine learning diagnostics, digital call centres, and on-site veterinary visits.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The initiative directly supports the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2030 by:

- Addressing service delivery gaps for communal and small-scale farmers (Constraint 4)
- Enhancing disease reporting and integration with national traceability systems (Constraint 5)
- Enabling early detection and resource prioritisation to mitigate disease risks (Constraint 6)

Value to the Industry

By improving access to veterinary support and real-time field data, the platform will strengthen animal health outcomes, empower producers, and enhance the sector's resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability. It also bridges the gap between research and practical field application, especially in underserved areas.

Expected Outcomes

- Mapping of existing veterinary support tools and comparative analysis
- Summary of user requirements and digital readiness
- Content development framework for multilingual, farmer-friendly materials
- Pilot-ready blueprint including system architecture, user experience, and implementation plan

Researcher: Gendac – David Malan

8. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Roadmap for the South African Red Meat Industry

Research Focus

This project aims to develop a comprehensive Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) roadmap for the South African red meat industry. It builds on international ESG standards while addressing local realities, and is designed to align directly with the RMIS 2030 Strategy.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

The research supports RMIS's strategic goals by defining a sustainability framework that enhances long-term competitiveness, inclusivity, and resilience. It integrates existing compliance frameworks, identifies material sustainability issues, and proposes robust data governance and reporting mechanisms.

Value to the Industry

The roadmap will enable industry-wide alignment and transparency, helping RMIS communicate its environmental stewardship, social inclusion, and governance integrity to both domestic and global stakeholders. It positions the industry to meet evolving market and regulatory expectations while strengthening its reputation and operational sustainability.

Expected Outcomes

- A customised ESG roadmap tailored to RMIS's strategic priorities and stakeholder context
- An Objectives and Key Results (OKR) framework with ESG goals and targets
- Recommendations on data governance, reporting mechanisms, and a communication strategy
- A consolidated roadmap including targets, timelines, KPIs, and responsibilities

Researcher: AgriFusion – Mr Frans van Wyk

9. Integrated Market Development Framework towards a Quality-Based Beef Marketing Strategy for South Africa

Research Focus

The research aims to develop a market- and consumer-focused strategic framework to guide beef marketing in South Africa. The project seeks to enhance transparency, competitiveness, and inclusivity within the red meat value chain by upgrading the country's grading and classification system to better reflect both market requirements and consumer preferences.

Currently, South Africa's carcass classification system does not adequately communicate quality attributes such as tenderness, marbling, and eating quality to consumers. This initiative will therefore assess the need for revision and develop a roadmap for implementation of a quality-linked beef grading framework.

The research will:

- Analyse current and potential market-product combinations to identify opportunities for differentiation and value creation.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of consumer perceptions in South Africa and key export markets.
- Benchmark South Africa's grading and classification system against international systems such as *Meat Standards Australia (MSA)* and *AUS-MEAT*.

- Examine how the Meat Safety Act and Agricultural Product Standards Act can support enforceable quality and export standards.

The outcome will be a strategic roadmap for an upgraded grading system that aligns with consumer expectations, enhances producer price incentives, and supports sustainable market growth.

Alignment with the Red Meat Industry Strategy

This project is fully aligned with the Red Meat Industry Strategy 2030, which highlights the importance of product quality, market development, traceability, and inclusive growth.

Specifically, the research contributes by:

- Developing a quality-based grading and marketing system that links measurable product attributes to market value.
- Enhancing transparency and fairness in pricing mechanisms across the value chain.
- Strengthening competitiveness and export readiness through enforceable minimum and superior product standards.
- Promoting inclusive participation of smallholder and emerging producers in formal markets.
- Building consumer trust through accurate, transparent quality communication and labelling.

Through this alignment, the project advances the sector's collective goal of a resilient, competitive, and sustainable red meat industry built on quality and trust.

Value to the Industry

- Establishes a credible, science-based grading framework tailored to South African conditions and consumer expectations.
- Enhances market transparency and creates value-based pricing mechanisms that reward quality.
- Expands market access and supports export growth through internationally benchmarked standards.
- Builds consumer confidence by providing reliable indicators of eating quality and product consistency.
- Strengthens industry coordination and governance, including roles for oversight bodies such as SAMIC.

- Promotes inclusive growth by linking smallholder and emerging farmers to higher-value markets.
- Encourages evidence-based decision-making through integrated consumer research, market analysis, and scenario modelling.

Expected Outcomes

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Researcher: BFAP – Gerhard van den Burg and Prof Phillip Strydom (Stellenbosch University)

To learn more about RMIS's research initiatives and broader strategy, visit www.rmis.co.za

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