

The scheduled monthly cattle market in Rwimbogo Sector of Gatsibo District in Eastern Rwanda, has been canceled due to concerns about the spread of smallpox.

According to the district authorities, the decision comes after reports of suspected cases in neighboring Kayonza District.

Gatsibo District Mayor Gasana Richard says that the cancellation is a precautionary measure based on information from the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB).

“RAB advised us to halt the market due to fluctuating test results for smallpox in Kayonza, potentially posing a risk of transmission through infected cattle,” he explained.

Farmers in the district reported cases of the disease near Gikobwa Village in Kagari Ka Munini, Rwimbogo Sector, highlighting the close proximity of the threat. While Gatsibo saw three isolated cases in December 2023, swift intervention prevented further spread.

The experience of the December outbreak has prompted authorities to exercise caution.

“We don’t want to take any chances,” Mayor Richard emphasized. “The health of our livestock and the livelihoods of our farmers are at stake.”

It comes as a blow to local farmers, meat traders, and sellers that the cattle market has been cancelled. With no immediate alternative to selling their animals, their incomes are negatively impacted.

“This cancellation will definitely affect our business,” says Jean Baptsite Hategekimana, who owns a butcher shop in Kayonza.

“The Gatsibo market was a major source of livestock for many here, and without it, we’ll have to look further afield, likely leading to higher prices and potentially even shortages,” he pointed out.

Traders and sellers of meat are concerned that market cancellations will disrupt the established supply chain and force them to seek alternative sources, often at greater distances and with greater costs.

This could translate to higher prices for consumers, adding another layer of burden during uncertain times.

District authorities are said to be working closely with RAB to monitor the situation in Kayonza and ensure no spillover into Gatsibo.

In addition, continued testing and surveillance measures are reported to be taking place to contain the outbreak and prevent future disruptions.

Farmers and residents have said that they await further updates from RAB and local authorities regarding the timeline for its reopening.