By Jejje Muhinde;

Authorities in the districts of Gatsibo, Kayonza, and Kirehe have urged residents to abide by the existing ban on trading and movement of livestock in a bid to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease (FMD).

According to the authorities, the move is in response to the failure by the residents to abide by the existing quarantine that was announced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry this week.

In a statement issued on the evening of June 24, 2020, the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Dr. Gerardine Mukeshimana instructed that all livestock movement be suspended in these areas due to outbreaks of the disease.

The Minister further stated the outbreak was located in Kahi, Kanyinya cells of Gahini and Ndego sectors of Kayonza district.

“Animal movement including cow, pig, goat, and sheep for any reason let it breeding, sale, and treatment in Gahini, Mwiri, Murundi and Ndego sectors of Kayonza is forbidden.” The Minister’s communique read.

Other towns that have been put under quarantine include; Rwimbogo, Kabarore, and Kiziguro sectors of Gatsibo District as well as Nasho and Mpanga sectors and Kirehe district were suspended.

The Minister also requested that all calves under 6 months in the mentioned sectors should be protected.

Livestock farmers and animal owners have also been requested to contact veterinarians when they suspect their animals to have signs of foot-and-mouth disease.

In addition, they have also been asked to remain vigilant.

“Anyone who sees any unknown animal, rioting around should notify the nearest authorities or Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) staff,” The Ministers statement further read

Residents in these sectors were warned that anyone who violates the quarantines will be subject to the penalties.

However, some eyewitnesses have explained that some of the farmers are not cooperating, as they're continuing to sell their livestock and their products to traders who move the animals at night.

Reports have also indicated that last week, out of 104 tested cattle in Nyamiyaga village, Kahi cell in Gahini, 23 exhibited signs of foot and mouth disease.

In Gahini still, over 53 livestock were purported to be infected.

Same Nkusi, a farmer says that the disease has created panic, but he is also confident the quarantine will help reduce the spread of the disease.

"We are trying to limit the movement of milk vendors who move from one home to another collecting milk," He said, adding that we they have also increased surveillance to stop the disease from spreading.

Despite efforts put forward by the different stakeholders to control the spread of the disease, outbreaks have continually occurred in the Eastern Province.

In 2020, the same district was imposed under quarantine due to a similar outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

At the time, Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) explained such areas are prone to outbreaks mainly due to the fact that stress levels rise in cattle during the dry season, while immunity goes down, and the infection in virus carriers turns into disease.

Dr. Solange Uwituze, Deputy Director-General in charge of Animal Resources Research and Technology Transfer at RAB noted that the eastern region is "at high risk" of the disease because FMD is endemic in neighboring countries, which becomes easy for it to cross into the country through both animal and human movement.

Experts on the other hand have revealed the cause is also attributed to climate change.

FMD is a highly contagious viral disease of livestock causing fever followed by the development of vesicles (blisters) chiefly in the mouth and on the feet.