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Stock theft on the rise in SA

Statistics indicate that 25 000 cows were stolen last year with high theft levels in Free State, Eastern Cape and recent increase in NW

KUTULLO MADISHA AND
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AN ESTIMATED 25 000 livestock, mostly cows, were stolen from owners in 2016.

South African Police Service statistics showed that stock theft was one of the most common crimes in the Free State and Eastern Cape but had recently increased in the North West, Mpumalanga and Gauteng.

The number of cases in the Eastern Cape and the Free State are much higher than those in the three other provinces.

On Friday, two men appeared at the Tweespruit Magistrate's Court after being arrested on the N8 near Tweespruit on Wednesday.

Two police officers were patrolling the busy road when they noticed two men herding sheep to Tweespruit.

When the police approached them, they ran and left the 14 sheep behind.

During the interrogation, the pair revealed that the sheep were valued at R21 000 and were stolen at a farm near Ladybrand.

"They were charged with possession of suspected stolen stock and all the stock were handed back to the owner Theo van Zyl, who positively identified he recovered sheep," police spokesperson Sgt Martin Xuma said.

The National Stock Theft Preven-



tion Forum urged producers to report livestock theft.

The plea follows a host of meetings between the forum and other role players across the country.

"It is obvious that the statistics regarding the non-reporting of stock theft cases are not over-extrapolated and that stock theft as a crime, is on the

increase," the organisation said.

Gerhard Schutte, from the National Red Meat Producers Organisation said that recovery of cattle was 40% while small livestock such as goats and sheep was between 18% and 21%.

The good progress with stock theft is attributed to the fact that farmers mark their livestock and become involved to

help during major stock theft incidents and also report cases to the police.

"The issues depend on the province. When it gets to the numbers, the provinces with the highest number of stolen cattle are KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State," Schutte said.

The areas targeted are Gauteng, with specific reference to Nigel, Devon,



ON THE RISE: Gerhard Schutte of the National Red Meat Producers.

Heidelberg, Vereeniging, Barrage and Fochville.

In the North West, areas such as Lindequesdrift, Potchefstroom and Ventersdorp are targeted and in the Free State areas such as Heilbron, Edenville, Koppies, Kroonstad and Parys."

Special stock theft operations in the Free State have led to several successes from January 1 to March 31.

The VKB/FSA Safety Desk said according to feedback from the Free State's priority committee for rural safety, more than 250 arrests were made in this period, with 1 000 head of livestock recovered.

According to a study by WA Lombard of the University of the Free State, conducted in 2014, 75% of sheep theft in the Free State was not reported. "Statistics South Africa reported in 2011 that 36.3% of stock theft cases were not reported by the victims.

In 2012 this number rose to 40.1% and in 2013 it increased drastically to 63%," the forum said.

Statistics South Africa confirmed in 2015 that the non-reporting rate had escalated to 67.7%.

According to NSTPF, there was a continuous rise in livestock theft and livestock producers in areas where livestock theft is very common, have seen a plague of thefts since May 2016.

KwaZulu-Natal police are appealing to community members not to buy stolen goods from criminals.

Lt-Col Thulani Zwane said buying the stolen goods meant they were encouraging criminals to commit more crime because they knew that the goods would be sold easily.

"We also encouraged the community to make sure that they mark their goods so that their items will be easy to identify if found by police.

"Make sure that serial numbers are kept in a safe place for those goods that have serial numbers. It will help to identify your property should the police find them," Zwane said.

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