African ministers commit to scaling up livestock innovations to achieve greater self-reliance

KIGALI, RWANDA, September 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- African ministers of livestock and agriculture, and their representatives from eight countries, pledged to work together to strengthen the livestock sector during a roundtable at the Africa Food Systems Forum in Kigali, Rwanda. Their goal is to strengthen livestock value chains, unlock investment, expand market and trade, and build partnerships needed to scale livestock solutions across the continent.

The pledge responds to a widening gap between Africa's potential and its performance. Africa spends between $70 billion and $100 billion on food imports annually, driven in part by lagging productivity compared to other regions. Africa holds around a fifth of the world's cattle but produces just five percent of its milk. Meanwhile, animal-source foods are the most expensive food group for Africans, for whom healthy diets are the furthest out of reach, with demand projected to grow 280 percent by 2050. Ministers agreed that closing this gap is central to food security, job creation, and economic transformation across the continent.

Ministers or their representatives from Nigeria, Uganda, Niger, Mali, Malawi, Rwanda and Ethiopia as well as Honorable Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, former President of Botswana, took part in the session, convened by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), and hosted by AGRA.

They discussed the most promising interventions for improving livestock productivity, from livestock genetics to quality feed and animal health initiatives, as well as what large-scale delivery actually requires, and the conditions needed to move from livestock plans to implementation.

The private sector was given a direct voice in the ministerial discussion. Mucai Kunyiha, Group CEO of CKL Africa, laid out what it takes for the market to deliver at scale. With ruminant vaccinations, he said, the critical challenge is not producing more doses, but to build a sustainable system in which governments, producers, manufacturers, veterinarians, communities and regional institutions continuously build together over time. “Vaccination is a system, not an event,” he said. That, he added, is what transforms a vaccination campaign into a vaccination system and unlocks private sector investment.

“Clearly Africa doesn't lack solutions for its livestock sector. What it lacks is scale and

productivity. Closing this gap between what Africa produces and what it imports is the key to delivering on the promise of the continent's $1trillion annual agribusiness potential," said Appolinaire Djikeng, ILRI Director General. "Today's commitments show ministers are ready to move from proven innovations to the investment and regional trade that turn them into a continent-wide blueprint for self-reliance."

Dairy served as this year's illustrative value chain, one proof point among several the Ministerial Platform will examine in future editions. Ethiopia's experience anchored the discussion: the country raised its milk production from 7.1 billion liters in 2022 to 15.7 billion liters in 2025/26, a 122 per cent increase. This was made possible through the government's Yelemat Tirufat ("Bounty of the Basket") initiative, with more than 36,000 new dairy villages and 5,000 dairy clusters, and new cross-border trade agreements. Ethiopia's representative was candid that feed production, though it has more than doubled over the same period, remains the binding constraint on further growth.

"Africa does not lack livestock potential. We do not lack animals. We do not lack farmers. We do not lack science and technical knowledge. We certainly do not lack demand. And, increasingly, we do not lack policy recognition. What we have lacked is the ability to connect all these pieces and deliver at scale. Africa's livestock priority is no longer recognition. It is delivery," explained Professor Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, Chair of Council Zimbabwe National University of Science and Technology, extraordinary Professor University of Pretoria, Co-Chair Food Planet Prize.

Ministers discussed how transformation happens only where production, trade and governance advance together, rather than as parallel tracks. This is the logic behind the Integrated Regional Livestock Value Chain (IRLVC) program, led by AU-IBAR, which is already backing more than 30 regional projects, including a dairy market program in East Africa and a regional poultry health program in West Africa, with partners including the European Union, IFAD and the World Bank.

"We already know what works. The task now is coordinating policy and trade across borders, so proven livestock solutions can scale from one country to a continent. That is what the Integrated Regional Livestock Value Chain program is built to do, and what today's commitments move us closer to," said Dr. Huyam Salih, Director of the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR).

Every country that took the floor asked for the Ministerial Platform to continue. The recommendation from the session is to institutionalize it as the political and learning platform for delivery of the African Union's Integrated Regional Livestock Value Chain Program — a ten-year program to 2035 reporting through the CAADP Biennial Review. Anchored in the annual Africa Food Systems Forum and building toward the First African Union Summit on Animal Resources Transformation, it would give ministers a standing role in continental delivery rather than an annual conversation.

Five priorities were identified

- Financing built for livestock: patient capital and terms matched to biological production cycles.
- Open borders to trade: harmonized standards, mutual recognition of certification, coordinated disease control.
- Data that proves progress: national herd data, animal identification and traceability, and a shared baseline from Kigali.
- Livestock's place in government: dedicated ministries, budget share against the CAADP 10% commitment, representation in AfCFTA.
- Peer learning between countries: starting with the unresolved question of who pays for animal health.

Closing the session, Professor Djikeng, ILRI's Director General, pledged that the Institute would deepen its engagement with governments between Forums: "It is my pledge that our institution will continue to participate in this — in between, not just when we meet at the next forum" adding that ILRI will continue to work closely with AU-IBAR to support delivery on commitments made during the livestock ministerial roundtable.

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