

Minister accused of approving illegal sale of 900 govt cattle

Blamed. Ms Joy Kabatsi is accused of authorising the sale of cattle despite her senior blocking the move, citing theft.

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KAMPALA. The Minister of State for Agriculture, Ms Joy Kabatsi, and other officials have been accused of authorising illegal sale of cattle, including from two government ranches of Ruhengyere and Nshaara in western Uganda.

Ms Kabatsi is in charge of the Animal Husbandry docket.

Senior officials at the Entebbe-based National Animal Genetics Resources Centre & Data Bank (NAGRC & DB), including the executive director, Dr Charles Lagu, and board chairman, Johnson Nkuhe, have been named in the alleged theft of cattle, including three imported South African exotic bulls from the two government ranches.

They have been ordered to step aside to allow smooth investigations by police and the Inspector General of Government.

Agriculture minister Vincent Ssempiija alleges that the officials connived to illegally sell off the livestock on the two ranches, but his junior, Ms Kabatsi and the implicated officials at NAGRC & DB said the alleged stolen animals were actually sold because they had been declared "culls" and therefore "no longer wanted" on the ranches.

The Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Pius Wakabi Kasajja, told *Daily Monitor* yesterday that they have since written to NAGRC & DB board chairman to institute investigations into the allegations.

"We have also received a copy of a letter from the Inspector General of Government to the executive director-NAGRC & DB initiating investigations into the same allegations.



Visit. Ms Joy Kabatsi (with stick) and some MPs at Ruhengyere government ranch last year. PHOTO BY RAJAB MUKOMBOZI

I am therefore constrained to comment under the circumstances," Mr Wakabi said yesterday.

Dr Nkuhe admitted they sold the cattle, but denied any wrongdoing.

"We sold according to authority and the money totaling Shs616m was deposited on the Consolidated Fund account. The board meeting in December last year authorised the sale. We did not sell any of the bulls. They [animals] are in Entebbe where they are supposed to be. The sale of the cattle and goats was clearly advertised," he said.

On April 20, Mr Ssempiija had blocked the sale which he called "theft of government cattle" and instructed Dr Lagu and Dr Nkuhe to step aside to allow investigations.

However, Ms Kabatsi on April 26 chaired a board meeting which rejected his directives and authorised the sale of the animals.

When contacted for a comment, Ms Kabatsi denied any wrongdoing.

"I know the selling of the animals was advertised towards the end of December. The adverts were put on radio stations in those areas (where

the ranches are). The executive director was not around when the board decision was taken because he was in China with the minister (Ssempiija). I chaired the board (on April 26) because the chairman was under interdiction and after we found that the procedure was okay. I communicated the minutes to the minister and also discussed with him on phone," Ms Kabatsi said.

Minister raises alarm

On April 23, Mr Ssempiija had written to Dr Nkuhe, saying initial investigations had confirmed an illegal sale of more than 900 cows.

He said the animals were being sold without the board approval and contrary to Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) regulations.

"I have been reliably informed that on Sunday April 22, 2018, after we had that investigative meeting; police arrested [impounded] two lorries ferrying cows illegally from Ruhengyere Ranch. This is total disrespect and insubordination of authority," Mr Ssempiija wrote.

He said both Dr Lagu and Dr Nkuhe "were both alleged to have been involved in illegal sale of animals".

"This is very disturbing information and if found to be true, it is illegal and tantamount to theft of government property... Thorough investigations should be conducted and culprits be brought to book," Mr Ssempiija stated and ordered deployment of police to guard all government ranches.

"During this period, no cows should be brought in or taken out of the ranches," he said and instructed police to investigate the alleged theft of the livestock.

However, Dr Lagu denied the allegations yesterday.

"The allegations against me are unfounded. I agree the minister met me and asked about the claims that animals were sold illegally. The board chairman was not in that meeting. It is also a lie that I connived with the State Minister to sell the animals. These animals were already culls and the board decided that they be sold and a disposal plan was made which was followed regularly," he said.

Tomorrow in Saturday Monitor

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- Find out what farmers learnt at the ninth farm clinic at Mbazardi.
- Read about Joyce Acan who abandoned hairdressing for poultry farming.
- Also find out how you can earn more from rearing goats.



KABATSI'S INVOLVEMENT

Ms Kabatsi chaired a board meeting that ignored Mr Ssempiija's directives and also concluded the cattle sale had been authorised by the board on December 20, 2017 and therefore would not investigate Dr Lagu and Dr Nkuhe for any alleged impropriety. A total of 916 cattle and 165 goats worth Shs616.7m were sold from the ranches

Fund account. Aware that Ssempiija had blocked the sale, Ms Kabatsi on May 8 this year wrote to Agriculture police commander Hillary Odoch asking him to release the sold cattle at Ruhengyere ranch. She said she had met the buyers who had bought the animals from the two ranches. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to allow the animals to