

# Maputo rustlers on Swaziland border rampage

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NELSPRUIT. — Rustlers from Mozambique, operating in heavily armed groups of 10 or more, have brought the farming community in the Swaziland border town of Siteki to a standstill by grabbing cattle in broad daylight.

In the past six months more than 1 000 head have been taken at gunpoint from Swazi farmers and driven across the border, where they are prompt-

ly slaughtered and then thrown on to lorries which travel to Maputo 70km away where there is a demand for beef.

Farmers have been given visas to enter Mozambique to seek stolen cattle.

Members of the Royal Swaziland Defence Force pursued one group of five cattle rustlers and shot them dead inside Mozambican territory, causing a diplomatic row.

Chiefs and farmers in the area have asked the Swaziland

government to arrange permits to sell meat directly to Maputo in a move to end rustling.

One of the hardest hit is Branham Carmichael, 42, who has watched helplessly as rustlers armed with AK 47s stole 400 head in five months.

"My herders were surprised by 15 Mozambicans who sprang out of the bushes. They told the herders to drive the cattle into Mozambique. On that occasion 150 head were taken," he said.

A few hours later he heard

shots and his herders returned to tell him all 150 head had been slaughtered.

"I've lost more than R500 000 since the rustling began. We now ask the Swaziland Defence Force to accompany us when we take cattle to the dip. But they say it's impossible for them to give us 24-hour protection," Mr Carmichael says.

Farmers have formed a crime prevention committee but some of the smaller farmers have been wiped out.