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MINISTER STEENHUISEN ADDRESSES BIOSECURITY THREATS FACING THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

TOP NEWS

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DOA@gov_ZA National Department of Agriculture @doagov_za National Department of Agriculture www.nda.gov.za



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FROM THE MINISTER'S DESK

Strengthening our biosecurity systems opens the door to new trade opportunities, safeguards jobs, and boosts investor confidence in South African agriculture.

The past few years have made our vulnerabilities painfully clear. The 2023 avian influenza outbreak was not just a veterinary issue, it triggered widespread food price shocks, supply shortages, and devastating losses for producers. Similarly, ongoing outbreaks of Foot and mouth disease (FMD) have resulted in livestock movement bans, halted exports, and widespread economic distress, particularly in rural provinces.

We have also faced listeriosis, swine flu, pepper ringspot virus, Goss's wilt, and other threats. Each has disrupted our supply chains, shaken consumer confidence, and weakened our position in international markets.

These are not isolated agricultural problems; they are systemic risks. They undermine livelihoods, dent the gross domestic product, and strain the social contract.

We cannot hide behind these realities. We need action. That is why we have embarked on a transformed approach to biosecurity, moving from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention and sustainable growth.

For the first time ever, we will have the mass vaccination of poultry in the country to protect the local flock from avian influenza. We have identified the farms to be vaccinated, secured vaccine supply, ensured cold chain capacity, and are building in traceability and reporting mechanisms as part of a wider preparedness strategy. To combat FMD we procured 900 000 doses of vaccine from the Botswana Vaccine Institute and



BIOSECURITY IS OUR LIFELINE

In an era of escalating global challenges that range from climate change to persistent economic headwinds, I have spent countless hours grappling with the challenges facing our country's vibrant, yet vulnerable agricultural sector.

One issue consistently emerges as the most fundamental, the very bedrock upon the future of our agriculture rests—biosecurity.

Biosecurity is far from being a mere technical term used by scientists and others in the food value chain. For me, it does not just mean the preventing of disease. It is about enabling growth, safeguarding livelihoods, and ensuring stability of our nation's food security.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor-in-Chief

Moses Rannditsheni : 063 623 3012 • MosesR@nda.gov.za

Chief Copy Editor

Lerato Mofokeng : 012 312 8303 • LeratoMOF@nda.gov.za

Copy Editors

Eben Rademeyer : 012 312 8310 • EbenR@nda.gov.za

Ramokone Teffo : 012 312 8308 • RamokoneT@nda.gov.za

Senior Designer

Sibongile Ngcezu-Lingwazadzela: 082 640 2051 • SibongileN@nda.gov.za

Sub-Editor and Coordinator

Rony Moremi : 066 084 6192 • RincertM@nda.gov.za

Reporters

Joylene Van Wyk : 083 292 7399 • joylenev@nda.gov.za

Innocent Mhlanga : 082 819 1808 • InnocentM@dalrrd.gov.za

Matsepo Malatswane : 066 084 6355 • MatsepoM@nda.gov.za

Samuel Kgatla : 066 084 6653 • SamuelK@nda.gov.za

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started to vaccinate the most crucial areas identified.

At the 2025 Biosecurity Summit held on 10 June 2025 at the University of Pretoria, I made it clear that at the heart of our new approach is the National Biosecurity Hub—a joint venture between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Science and Innovation, launched in 2022 at Innovation Africa.

The hub strengthens surveillance, supports real-time data exchange, and promotes rapid risk assessment across the plant and animal health spectrum.

Through digital collections of pests and pathogens, field diagnostics, and a centralised biosecurity information platform, it empowers decision-makers with the evidence they need to act early and decisively.

The hub supports the goals of the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan (AAMP) and the Decadal Plan by integrating pest and disease management with export competitiveness and rural industrialisation.

One of its most impactful elements is the Graduate Internship Programme, bringing new energy, skills, and capacity into the sector. We are building not only resilience, but also careers.

To enhance our current trajectory of “taking the bull by the horns”, I proposed the development of a National Biosecurity

Compacts—hard commitment between government, industry, academia, and civil society.

This compact will:

- define baseline vaccine stock levels;
- clarify roles and responsibilities during outbreaks;
- embed data-sharing mechanisms and institutional partnerships like the Biosecurity Hub;
- provide a framework for coordinated, credible, and timely responses.

This is not about creating more paperwork. It is about getting everyone on the same page before the next crisis hits. I cannot stress this enough—South Africa’s biosecurity system is not only about defending against risk, it is also about enabling growth and securing a stable and prosperous future for all. Biosecurity is our lifeline. Let us join hands and unleash the full potential of South African agriculture.



Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen and Vice Chancellor and Principal of University of Pretoria, Prof Francis Petersen, during the National Biosecurity Summit.



Minister John Steenhuisen and Dr Litha Magingxa, CEO and President of the ARC, at the National Biosecurity Summit.

MINISTER STEENHUISEN ADDRESSES BIOSECURITY THREATS FACING THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR



Minister John Steenhuisen addressing delegates during the National Biosecurity Summit at University of Pretoria Hatfield Campus.



Dr. Litha Magingxa ARC CEO in the middle during the panel discussions of the National Biosecurity Summit at TUKS.

Samuel Kgatla

The Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, frankly addressed the significance of biosecurity threats currently facing South African agriculture. The minister was addressing delegates during the National Biosecurity Summit at the Sanlam Auditorium, University of Pretoria Hatfield Campus on 10 June 2025. The two-day meeting came at a time when the country is dealing with outbreaks of Foot and mouth disease (FMD), African swine fever, and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). This has resulted in economic losses, food security concerns and panic by some farmers and members of the public. The intention is to protect South Africa's agricultural future through stronger and smarter biosecurity.

The summit, under the theme: "Collaborative Actions for Food Security and Trade", is a result of the successful launch of the Biosecurity Hub at Innovation Africa in October 2022. It is a pivotal platform for shaping South Africa's biosecurity future. The Biosecurity Hub is a platform created jointly by the university and government to promote communication and collaboration on human, animal and plant sanitary threats affecting food security. It is also aligned with the overarching objectives of the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan (AAMP) and the Decadal Plan.

The minister, a biosecurity activist who believes that biosecurity is everyone's responsibility also reported significant progress with the "Biosecurity Hub" initiated in 2022, which is modernising surveillance systems through digital data exchange and sophisticated risk assessment tools. "This digital transformation aims to facilitate early detection and rapid response to emerging

threats. The consequences of these biosecurity breaches extend far beyond the farm gate. They create food shortages, price shocks, and particularly strain our rural and subsistence farmers who have limited resources to absorb these impacts. Biosecurity is not a "nice-to-have", but it is as fundamental to national stability as clean water, reliable electricity, or functioning roads. When it works, farmers prosper, food remains affordable, and our exports flourish," he said.

Steenhuisen also outlined a comprehensive approach to tackling persistent biosecurity challenges while creating new opportunities for growth across the agricultural sector. In conclusion, he called for immediate action and sustained commitment from all agricultural stakeholders.

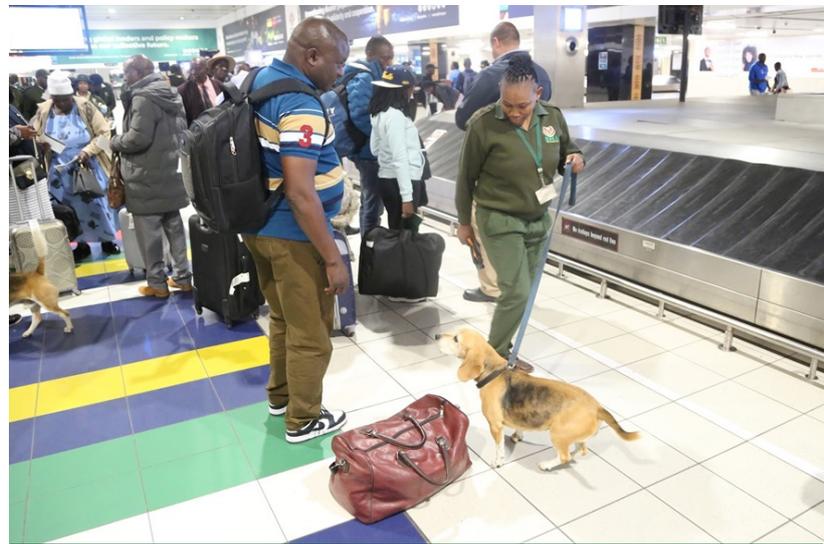
Mr Wandile Sihlobo, Chief Economist at the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (Agbiz), also called for urgent, focused action to reinforce the country's biosecurity systems as threats to animal and plant health grow more severe. He highlighted the need to develop a far more robust disease surveillance and control system to achieve the export ambitions.

The leaders, international experts and stakeholders from the public and private sectors also touched on public-private partnership for biosecurity, national biosecurity diagnostic network, biosecurity education and awareness, market access and surveillance in ensuring that biosecurity benefits reach all levels of South African agriculture.

AGRICULTURE AND BORDER MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANT HEALTH



Department of Agriculture and Border Management Authority officials during the International Day of Plant Health at OR Tambo International Airport.



A dog handler from the Border Management Authority demonstrating how they do their work at OR Tambo Airport.

Samuel Kgatla

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Border Management Authority (BMA) marked this year's International Day of Plant Health (IDPH) by shining the light on the importance of plant health and leveraging innovation to protect plants. Both DoA and BMA joined global partners in commemorating the IDPH on 12 May at OR Tambo International Airport. The intention was to highlight the vital role of plants in sustaining life on earth and the urgent need to protect them from increasing threats.

This year's IDPH was commemorated under the theme "The Importance of Plant Health in One Health" to raise global awareness and action towards protecting plant health to help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect biodiversity and the environment, and boost economic development.

According to the United Nations International Observances, healthy plants contribute to healthy living in numerous ways, offering both physical and mental health benefits, and help the animals. They can purify the air, reduce stress, improve focus, and even boost overall well-being. Plant health is key to the sustainable development of agriculture required to feed a global population by 2050. Plants are life and people depend on them for 80% of the food they eat and 98% of the oxygen they breathe. According to the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR), every year, up to 40% of global food crops are lost to pests and diseases, costing the global economy more than USD 220 billion. The United Nations states that plants are vital to life, however, pests and diseases are spreading fast, threatening our crops, environment, and livelihoods. This day

reminds us that everyone has a role to play in preventing their spread. Healthy plants support healthy people, animals, and ecosystems. Moreover, the BMA's Sedupe K9 Unit demonstrated how detector dogs help protect South Africa from harmful pests and diseases. The dogs inspect luggage for plant materials, animals, and non-compliant food items.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Mr Ernest Phoku, emphasised the importance of plant health in safeguarding South Africa's agricultural economy, protecting ecosystems, and upholding international standards. "Protecting One Health can help to fight hunger, and this is an important day, that is why we collaborated with DoA. IDPH is relevant to us, and we need to have food security and make sure that plant health systems are upheld at a national level. Invasive plants continue to harm our biodiversity and this impacts on our health one way or another," he said.

Acting Director: Food Import and Export Standards, Mr Kgabo Matlala, delivered the keynote address and said that the concept of One Health emphasises the importance of collaboration across disciplines and sectors to prevent and respond to health issues at the interfaces between these systems. "Good agricultural practices supported by scientific and technological advancements are essential for aligning productivity with the One Health vision, ensuring the health and resilience of all the sectors. Agriculture must meet the needs of present and future generations, while ensuring profitability and balanced health across all the sectors," he said.

G20 SCIENTISTS TACKLE ISSUES RELATING TO SOIL HEALTH AND MANAGEMENT



Delegates attending the G20 Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists.

“ I am happy that scientists are discussing about soil health and sustainable management at this G20 MACS. Prioritising soil health is a powerful tool in the fight against climate change. We must double our efforts, so that we can address issues of food security. It is time to cultivate a profound respect for the soil, ”

Soil health and sustainable management were some of the technical issues discussed at international level by scientists during the Fourteenth Group of Twenty (G20) countries' Meeting of Agricultural Scientists (MACS) at The Ranch Hotel Resort in Polokwane from 26 to 28 May 2025.

The 2025 G20 MACS aims to promote collaborative efforts among G20 countries to implement science-based solutions for sustainable agricultural systems and ensure food and nutritional security. Furthermore, the meeting discussed global challenges, promoting international cooperation in science and technology, sharing knowledge and best practices.

Soil health and management in South Africa involves a range of practices focused on improving and maintaining the quality of the soil, particularly in agricultural contexts. In Africa, it is crucial for food security, agricultural productivity, and environmental sustainability. Soil health and soil management was one of the

Samuel Kgatla

thematic areas focused on during the G20 MACS. Sustainable soil management prioritises long-term productivity and resilience of the soil ecosystem.

During the G20 Summit in Brazil, soil health and management were also recognised as crucial for sustainable development and climate change mitigation. According to Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI), building and maintaining soil health is essential to agricultural sustainability and ecosystem function, but erosion, deforestation and intensive agriculture have led to the degradation of many soils. Access to global research is essential for managing soils to support food production for future generations.

The Director-General of the Department of Agriculture, Mr Mooketsa Ramasodi, mentioned that addressing the issue of soil health is significant to addressing the issue of food security and availability. “I am happy that scientists are discussing about soil health and sustainable management at this G20 MACS. Prioritising soil health is a powerful tool in the fight against climate change. We must double our efforts, so that we can address issues of food security. It is time to cultivate a profound respect for the soil,” he said.

The G20 MACS representatives made their interventions in navigating stewardship of biodiversity, genetic and natural resources and soil health and sustainable management. They all agreed that there is a need to redefine agricultural management practices and support all efforts to deal with soil health and sustainable management. Furthermore, they concluded that agricultural systems must be supported to manage soil health better. The G20 emphasised the importance of healthy soils for crop production, carbon sequestration, and overall ecosystem health.

UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO SHOWCASES SCIENCE AND RESEARCH TO G20 DELEGATES



Prof. Ashwell Ndhala, Senior Researcher at the University of Limpopo explaining how they do things at the Plant Production Unit.



Department of Agriculture officials who were part of the G20 MACS in Polokwane.



G20 MACS delegates enjoyed the site visit to the University of Limpopo.



G20 MACS delegate during the site visit at the University of Limpopo.

Samuel Kgatla

G20 delegates had an opportunity to experience how South Africa is handling its agriculture, science, and research at one of the notable institutions, the University of Limpopo (UL). The scientists visited the Faculty of Science and Agriculture on 28 May 2025 at UL's main campus. The faculty warmly received the G20 delegation and the visit showed the crucial role played by scientists and farmers in tackling issues of hunger, poverty and food security.

The inspirational journey enlightened delegates on how the university's Plant Production Farm is producing, harnessing and dealing with moringa. The university produces high quality moringa and works with other countries like India on the production and research about the special tree. Moringa is one of the university's flagship projects supported by government. The moringa tree has numerous purposes, including being a source of food, medicine, and various industrial applications. It is known as the "miracle tree" because of its nutritional value. It is rich in vitamins and minerals, making it valuable for fighting malnutrition and improving health.

The university's experimental farm provides excellent facilities for undergraduate and postgraduate training in both research and commercial production systems. The availability of various production units ensures continuous research and training

activities throughout the year. The institution continues to use postgraduate students and its professors to promote moringa in the country and the world. Government has identified moringa as an alternative crop for food and nutritional security..

Professor Ashwell Ndhala, Senior Researcher at UL, engaged with the delegates and said that as a university, they have small patches of experimental fields of the work they do with the communities. "Among many other plants that we are working with is moringa and it is one of the projects we are embarking on. We are assisting communities all over the country from seed production to crop monitoring, processing as well as product development and conformity. Moringa is known for its nutritional composition and functional food because it has medicinal properties," he said.

Ms Morongwa Pihlela is one of the postgraduate students doing experiential training at Plant Production Farm. She said that it was an honour for her to engage with the G20 scientists. "We have been hearing and seeing about G20 on televisions and radios, but now the delegates are here on the campus to see how we do things at university. They are also telling us how they do things in their own country, and as scientists we have a role to play in shaping the world," she said.

BUILDING RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL BIOECONOMY IN AFRICA



Some MACS delegates visited the exhibition centre during the G20 meetings in Polokwane.



DDG Dipepeneng Serage engaging with the G20 MACS delegates in Polokwane.

Innocent Mhlanga

The building of a resilient agricultural bioeconomy in Africa was one of the themes that were discussed in one of the plenary sessions of the G20 Meeting of Agricultural Scientists (MACS) meetings that was held in Limpopo from 26 to 29 May 2025.

The theme: Building resilient agricultural bioeconomies, emphasises unlocking Africa's potential by harnessing sustainable growth through biomass valorisation, which Professor Hans van Meijl from Wageningen University and Research Center describes as the production utilisation, conservation and regeneration of biological resources, including related knowledge, on science, technology and innovation. This will in turn translate into sustainable solutions for the information, products, processes, and services within and across all economic sectors and enable a transformation to a sustainable economy.

The Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Nokuzola Capa, in her keynote address, emphasised the importance of transforming agrifood systems to achieve the global food and nutrition security targets as outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She said: "We are all aware that agriculture and food systems are central to global food and nutrition security. We are also aware of the more than 700 million people who experience hunger across the globe, with Africa being the worst affected."

It has been found through research that Africa has strong potential for developing a bioeconomy as it has abundant biomass resources, which means that the ecosystem is able to provide biomass from agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and waste streams which is the significant potential for bioenergy, bioplastic, and biochemicals/fertilisers.

Moreover, Africa is described as the biodiversity hotspot because it is home to rich biodiversity, which is important for bio-

based, pharmaceuticals chemicals and neutronics.

There are six areas of focus for agriculture, based on the research by the Wageningen University and Research Center, they are productive agriculture with low yields, such as nutrients depletion, productive forestry, ecosystems, trade access to nutritious food and access to non-food products.

Dr Thabiseng Motete in her presentation, emphasised the importance of bioeconomy, she said bioeconomy is mutually reinforced with the objective of creating sustainable and resilient food systems, as digital agriculture and tools are important for monitoring and achieving programmes and projects. Though it can achieve positive outcomes, it has its own challenges.

Dr Litha Magingxa, President and CEO of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), also recognised the important role played by scientists in the agricultural space. He said: "The role of agricultural scientists cannot be overstated; scientific evidence must be used to provide solutions to the farming communities."

Some of those challenges that farmers must deal with are digital disadvantages, meaning some cannot understand the technical and scientific language used on those gadgets. "It is impossible to talk about digital smart agriculture without talking about artificial intelligence, it is a revolution, it is a powerful accelerator of transformation but it also has the potential to accelerate inequalities if it is not used properly, ethically, and responsibly," said Dr Magingxa

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has emphasised that they will create digital agricultural programmes and develop artificial intelligence, with much better driven solutions using drones and satellite imaging owing to the European Union satellite technology.

STRENGTHENING LAND CONSERVATION: UPDATED CONSERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES ACT REGULATIONS ON VIRGIN SOIL CULTIVATION



Mpumi Ntlokwana addressing stakeholders during the CARA workshop, highlighting the importance of regulating virgin soil cultivation and the recent review of agricultural tariffs.

DoA hosted a national workshop in Johannesburg with all nine provincial departments and agricultural stakeholders to engage with the amended Regulation 2 of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (CARA), 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983).

The CARA of 1983 is a pivotal South African law aimed at promoting the sustainable use and conservation of agricultural resources, including soil, water and vegetation, and controlling invasive species. The latest significant amendments to CARA were published in the Governmental Gazette No. 52150, Notice No. R. 5876, dated 21 February 2025, and became effective on 1 April 2025.

This crucial regulation safeguards our land by strictly regulating the cultivation of virgin soil, helping to curb soil erosion and promote sustainable farming practices that will benefit future generations. During the workshop, Ms. Mpume Ntlokwana provided an insightful overview of the progress made under CARA, highlighting the recent review of tariffs as a key milestone. The workshop saw strong participation from agricultural stakeholders, reflecting a shared understanding of the importance of these measures in preserving South Africa's agricultural heritage and ensuring responsible land stewardship.

In April 2025, new tariffs and penalties under the CARA came into effect, marking a significant shift in how land users interact with regulatory processes. Key changes include an application fee of R500 and an appeal fee of R1 564, introducing formal costs to administrative procedures. Farmers are also required

Matsepo Maltswane

to share 50% of the herbicide costs for controlling invasive species like the prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia*) and needlegrass (*Nassella*), reinforcing a cooperative approach to land and biodiversity protection.

These updated regulations also impose steep penalties for non-compliance: R100 000 for a first offense and R200 000 for repeat violations. These measures emphasise the government's commitment to sustainable land use and responsible resource management. For farmers, these changes are a reminder that caring for the land goes hand-in-hand with regulatory accountability, and that active participation in conservation efforts is not just encouraged, it is essential.

As South Africa's agricultural landscape evolves, CARA remains a key safeguard for land stewardship. The recent amendments to Regulation 2 make it clear: Cultivation of virgin soil land uncultivated for at least ten years requires written permission from the department.

Farmers must submit applications at least 90 days prior to cultivation and land may undergo soil assessments such as profile pits to ensure environmental suitability. This crucial regulation helps curb soil erosion and promotes sustainable farming practices that protect the land for future generations.



Landcare specialist reflecting on their understanding of CARA.

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE CAADP STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN AND THE KAMPALA DECLARATION



Chairperson of the AU Commission Hon. Frank T Tumwebaze, Minister Steenhuisen, and Honourable Mardos Bekele-Thomas, CEO: AUDA-NEPAD.



Minister Steenhuisen with the delegates at the official launch of the CAADP Strategy.

Innocent Mhlanga

“ The launch of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Strategy and Action Plan and the Kampala Declaration is one of the key agenda items in my 100 Days Plan of Action for the commission since my resumption of office , a seed of hope has been planted in the fertile soil of Africa’s agricultural land scape and today we gather to nurture this seed into a harvest symbolising the transformation of our agricultural sector and the prosperity of our African people,” said His excellency Hounarable Moses Vilakati, the African Union (AU) Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment.

He further said that the journey in agriculture so far, has made them to travel the path from Maputo to Malabo Declarations and now a new journey with the Kampala declaration and CAADP Strategy and Action Plan 2025–2036, despite various challenges such as budgetary constraints, weak advocacy and awareness creation, weak infrastructure, the AU member states remain resilient to the commitment of CAADP.

Welcoming the delegates, the Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, said, “I was part of the meeting in Kampala when these important documents were developed, and I am looking forward to working with you towards their launch and implementation for the betterment of our agriculture on the continent.” The minister added that the prospects for expediting poverty alleviation in the coming years remains uncertain, as Africa faces the repercussions of socio-economic shocks and persistently high food inflation rates owing to disease outbreaks, climate change and other contributing factors.

The minister was speaking at the official launch of the CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026 to 2035) and the Kampala Declaration that took place in Johannesburg from the 5 to 7 May 2025.

The Hon. Frank K Tumwebaza, Chairperson of the AU Commission; Ugandan Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Honourable Nardos Bekele-Thomas, also attended the launch.

CAADP has been the driving force behind Africa’s agricultural transformation since its adoption in 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique. The Maputo CAADP framework aimed to accelerate economic growth, reduce poverty, and enhance food security through agriculture led growth, targeting a 6% annual agricultural GDP growth by 2015 and at least 10% of public expenditure spent on agriculture.

In 2024, the process for the development of the CAADP Strategy and Action Plan was started and concluded with its adoption, together with the associated CAADP Kampala Declaration, at a session of the AU Heads of State Assembly held from 9 to 12 January 2025 in Kampala, Uganda.

This CAADP Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2035 builds on previous successes, describes agri-food system transformation pathways and proposes strategic actions that will address emerging challenges and opportunities in the agricultural sector and contribute to a more prosperous Africa.

It focuses more on agrifood systems transformation with six strategic objectives, aimed at achieving multiple goals such as intensifying sustainable food production, agro-industrialisation and trade, boosting investment and financing for accelerated agri-food systems transformation, ensuring food and nutrition security, advancing inclusivity and equitable livelihoods, building resilient agri-food systems, and lastly but not least, strengthening agri-food systems governance.

KWAZULU-NATAL FARMERS BENEFIT FROM INFORMATION SHARING SESSION



A young farmer participating during the information sharing session with farmers of South Coast.



Scott Kvalsvig a commercial farmer in Port Shepstone sharing his expertise during the information sharing session at Gcilima in KZN.

Samuel Kgatla

South Coast farmers in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) benefited a lot from the insightful information sharing session held at Gcilima Community Hall at Gcilima Village in the Ugu District Municipality from 13 to 15 May 2025. The session was organised by the Department of Agriculture (DoA) in partnership with the KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Agricultural Research Council (ARC) as part of celebrating the International Day of Plant Health (IDPH). Furthermore, the initiative highlighted the importance of plant health for farmers in the area.

The session gave farmers an opportunity to engage with experts, share experiences, and learn a lot about marketing, managing viruses and staying updated with current farming practices, ultimately leading to more sustainable and competitive agricultural systems. The information sharing session brought together emerging farmers in the province to empower them to grow in their farming enterprises. DoA used the opportunity to enlighten the farmers about the Plant Health (Phytosanitary) Act, 2025 (Act No. 36 of 2025). The Act provides for phytosanitary measures to prevent the introduction, establishment and spread of regulated pests in South Africa and the control of regulated pests.

Farmers in the district are facing challenges of economic issues like lack of access to credit, limited income, difficulties in accessing markets and banana bunchy top virus (BBTV) in the area. They also grapple with poor infrastructure limitations, such as shoddy roads and unreliable transportation, and regulatory barriers such as complex regulations, stringent quality control

measures, and challenges in navigating the licensing system for agricultural products). Natural disasters like floods and droughts, along with climate change, significantly impact their livelihoods and crop yields. Officials from DoA, KZN DARD and the ARC shared opportunities offered by government and its entities.

DoA, ARC and KZN DARD officials also enlightened farmers about bursary opportunities offered by the department and important regulatory framework such as the National Plant Protection Organisation of South Africa (NPPOZA), Agricultural Products Standard Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990), Plant Health Act, 2024 (Act No. 36 of 2024), Import and Export of Agricultural Products in South Africa, quarantine pests for successful fresh produce marketing, , management of BBTv and Oriental Fruit Fly.

Mr Scott Kvalsvig, a commercial banana farmer at Port Shepstone encouraged farmers to plant more bananas but also warned them about the BBTv. "The soil is good for bananas in the area, and it is a big industry with the huge number of employments. We need to listen to scientists from the department and ARC. BBTv is big a threat and we must just be careful with it. I am a commercial farmer because of bananas and emerging farmers must never give up on farming banana," he said.

Ms Cadora Rachidi from DoA said that the department offers various opportunities when it comes to agriculture, and she urged farmers and youth to work closely with officials to get the necessary assistance. She said that it was the responsibility of the officials to make sure that farmers and youth understand how the department works. Rachidi also assisted some youth with applying for bursaries to further their education in agriculture.

FARMERS VISIT BANANA FARM TO SEE THE THREAT POSED BY BBTV



Mr Jeffrey Tshabalala from KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development showing farmers how BBTV is posing a threat to the banana industry.



Sphephelo Ngubane was visited by other farmers to see the damage done by BBTV.

Samuel Kgatla

A farm visit to Roseland Farm at Ramsgate in Kwa-Zulu-Natal (KZN) has enlightened farmers about the threat posed by the banana bunchy top virus (BBTV) to the banana sector. The farmers, who attended the information sharing session at Gcilima Village, visited the farm on 15 May 2025 as part of the awareness training on BBTV, which poses a serious threat to banana production in the country. This virus can devastate banana crops, affecting both large-scale commercial farms and small-scale subsistence farmers who rely on bananas for income and food security.

According to scientists from the Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), BBTV was first detected in South Africa in 2014 on the KZN South Coast, a region where banana farming is prevalent. Once a banana plant is infected by the pest, the entire plant, from the mother plant to the suckers, must be destroyed. When signs of BBTV start showing up in banana plantations, it indicates the presence of a serious plant disease which can lead to significant yield losses and plants dying off. BBTV can severely impact banana plants, leading to stunted growth and ultimately, crop failure. The virus is spread by the banana aphid, and once established, it is difficult to eradicate. The only way to control the speed of the virus is to be vigilant and to check banana plants for signs of stunted growth.

Roseland Farm, which is managed by Mr Sphephelo Ngubane, was affected by the BBTV early this year, however, DoA assisted him with pesticide to deal with the infected plants. He shared his first-hand experience in combating the devastating BBTV.

It affected 186 of his banana trees (more than three pellets of bananas), however, despite the setback, Sphephelo managed to recover from the loss of his banana plants. Currently, he employs 30 permanent staff and supplies nine markets with his fresh bananas.

Ngubane, who moved to the farm in 2016, told other farmers to guard against the BBTV. "It is important to look for the BBTV because once detected, it hurts, and I know what I am talking about. If you want your products to go to the market, then you must prioritise compliance. It is vital to always check the banana leaves for early-warning signs. Farmers must unite to combat BBTV, and we need to work together," he said.

Ngubane is also farming with sugar cane and timber, however, banana is his main crop on 189 hectares of land. His farm was acquired through the land reform process.

Dr Sinethemba Ximba from the ARC in Nelspruit warned farmers to be careful of BBTV. She advised farmers to plant banana trees that are free from diseases to avoid BBTV. "We always monitor the spread of BBTV as the ARC works together with the DoA and provincial departments of agriculture and rural development. There are chemicals to deal with BBTV and farmers must work closely with the department. We have many awareness campaigns and training to combat BBTV," she said, encouraging farmers to make use of the training opportunities provided.