



IN THIS ISSUE

p4 MINISTER STEENHUISEN TAKES FMD VACCINE ROLL-OUT TO FREE STATE

p5 MINISTER STEENHUISEN APPEALS FOR UNITY AND COOPERATION WITH DAIRY FARMERS TO COMBAT FMD CRISIS

p13 DOA CONSULTS STAKEHOLDERS ON DRAFT PLANT HEALTH REGULATIONS



follow us



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA





FROM THE MINISTER'S DESK

technicians, policy officials, logisticians and support staff have been instrumental in stabilising the situation and moving our response forward.

Over the past month, in particular, we have begun to see the tangible progress that comes from coordinated action. The national vaccination campaign is now well underway, with hundreds of thousands of animals being vaccinated each week as we work towards our target of vaccinating at least 80% of the national herd by December. This effort represents one of the largest livestock vaccination drives ever undertaken in South Africa.

The arrival of high-potency vaccines from international partners has been a pivotal step in enabling this rollout. The first batch of vaccines from Biogénesis Bagó in Argentina has already been deployed in the field, and the Dollvet vaccine doses from Turkey have begun arriving to strengthen the national pipeline. These supplies are being distributed across all provinces to ensure that vaccination efforts can proceed at scale and with consistency.

What has been particularly encouraging is the level of cooperation we are seeing between Government, the private veterinary profession, industry organisations and farming communities. A vaccination campaign of this magnitude cannot succeed through government action alone. It requires a whole-of-society response, and that is precisely what we are beginning to see take shape.

Earlier this month (March), I had the opportunity of visiting vaccination sites in Gauteng alongside the provincial leadership. One of those engagements took place in Magagula Heights, a communal farming area which experienced one of the first outbreaks in the province last year. Returning to that community



Over the past few months, our department has been engaged in one of the most demanding biosecurity responses in the history of South African agriculture. The scale of the Foot and mouth disease (FMD) challenge has required sustained effort from officials across multiple branches of the department, as well as close cooperation with provinces, industry bodies, veterinarians, and farming communities.

I want to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to all of you who have been working tirelessly on the ground and behind the scenes as part of this national effort. The professionalism and dedication shown by our veterinary teams, inspectors,

PEO (THE SEED) is the newsletter of the Department of Agriculture • Private Bag X250, PRETORIA 0001.

It is published by the Directorate: Media and External Communication • Private Bag X144, PRETORIA 0001.

Opinions expressed in PEO (THE SEED) are not necessarily those of the editorial team. No part of this newsletter may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system without prior permission from the Editor-in-Chief.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor-in-Chief

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

Chief Copy Editor

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

Copy Editors

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

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

Senior Designer

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

Sub-Editor and Coordinator

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

Reporters

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

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

Innocent Mhlanga : 063 693 0353 • InnocentM@nda.agric.za

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

Mercia Smith : 060 973 3816 • MerciaS@nda.agric.za



Cont from pg 2.

and seeing the vaccination programme in action was a powerful reminder of why this work matters. It demonstrated not only the progress that has been made, but also the importance of ensuring that communal farmers are fully included in our national response.

These visits are not ceremonial. They are opportunities to engage directly with farmers, veterinarians and officials who are implementing the response strategy on the ground. The feedback we receive during these engagements plays an important role in refining our strategy and ensuring that our interventions remain practical and responsive to the realities facing our producers.

The vaccination drive in KwaZulu-Natal has also continued to expand, supported by strong collaboration between provincial authorities, private veterinarians and industry partners. These efforts are essential, not only to contain the disease, but to protect the long-term sustainability of our livestock value chains.

As many of you will know, the approach we are implementing represents a fundamental shift in how South Africa manages FMD. For many years, our national strategy was primarily reactive—outbreaks would occur, movement would be restricted, zones would be declared and trade would be suspended while authorities attempted to extinguish the immediate fire. Once the outbreak subsided, the system would gradually relax until the next crisis inevitably emerged.

The new strategy marks a decisive move away from that cycle of crisis management. Instead of chasing outbreaks after they occur, we are building a system that actively manages risk across the livestock ecosystem. Vaccination, improved traceability, strengthened surveillance, better coordination with industry and enhanced diagnostic capacity are all part of this new framework.

This shift is not simply a technical adjustment, it is an economic necessity. The livestock sector sits at the heart of rural livelihoods and agricultural value chains. Persistent uncertainty caused by repeated outbreaks undermines investment, disrupts trade and places enormous strain on farmers who depend on stable markets. A system that manages risk credibly and consistently will restore confidence in our agricultural system and protect the livelihoods that depend on it.

Our objective is clear: to place South Africa firmly on a pathway toward regaining internationally recognised FMD-free status with vaccination. Achieving that goal will require sustained effort over many years, however, the work currently underway represents a crucial first step.

For the department, this period has also reinforced the importance of institutional coordination. Biosecurity is not the responsibility of veterinarians alone. It requires the alignment of policy, regulatory oversight, logistics, communication, and partnerships with industry and provincial governments. Many of you are contributing to this effort in ways that may not always be visible to the public, however, your work is essential to the success of the broader strategy.

While FMD understandably dominates much of our attention, we must also remain focused on the broader mission of the department. Protecting biosecurity systems is inseparable from protecting market access, safeguarding food security and supporting the long-term growth of our agricultural economy.

Colleagues, the months ahead will continue to demand focus, resilience and teamwork. The work we are doing now will shape the future of South African agriculture for years to come. I want to thank each of you for the commitment you continue to show under challenging circumstances.

Together, we are not only managing a crisis. We are laying the foundation for a stronger, more resilient biosecurity system that will serve the sector well into the future.



Minister Steenhuisen and the German Federal Minister of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity, Alois Reiner signed a joint Declaration of Intent.



MINISTER STEENHUISEN TAKES FMD VACCINE ROLL-OUT TO FREE STATE



From left: MEC for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs, Ms Elzabe Rockman; Veterinarian Estie Louw; and Minister John Steenhuisen during the demonstration of FMD vaccines in Free State.



Minister John Steenhuisen and MEC Elzabe Rockman during the vaccination drive at Glen in Free State.

Samuel Kgatla

“ We can turn things around if we stick to our FMD vaccine roll-out plan. We are working with DoA and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) to deal with the FMD outbreaks. The FMD vaccine roll-out programme is going to help our farmers in the province.”

The Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, visited Be Human Middlewater Farm outside Bloemfontein on 2 March 2026 as part of his nationwide FMD vaccine roll-out programme. Minister Steenhuisen, who was accompanied by the Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs, Ms Elzabe Rockman, has shown strong commitment to decisively deal with the FMD outbreaks in the country. The visit forms part of the Department of Agriculture's (DoA) commitment to curbing the spread of FMD and to fast-track the distribution of vaccine doses to provinces across the country.

This intervention brings significant relief to commercial and small-scale farmers in Free State. Some of them have been severely affected by movement restrictions and economic losses linked to outbreaks. The vaccine programme marks a crucial step toward safeguarding the province's livestock sector and strengthening national biosecurity efforts. As of 27 February 2026, the province has recorded 381 confirmed positive FMD cases, with a further 165 suspected cases awaiting laboratory confirmation. A first batch of 200 000 doses of the Biogénesis

Bagó FMD vaccine was delivered to the Free State on 21 February 2026. More than 76 000 doses have already been distributed across the province. In addition, millions more FMD vaccine doses have been procured and continue to arrive in the country to strengthen containment and prevention measures nationwide.

The MEC said that the vaccination process is being implemented in phases, prioritising high-risk areas before expanding to lower-risk zones. “We can turn things around if we stick to our FMD vaccine roll-out plan. We are working with DoA and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) to deal with the FMD outbreaks. The FMD vaccine roll-out programme is going to help our farmers in the province,” she said.

Dr Jurgens Barnard, Acting Director: Veterinary Services at the Free State Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs, based at Glen said that they are ready to roll out the FMD vaccine in the province and will move swiftly to vaccinate as many cattle as possible.

Minister Steenhuisen emphasised the State's commitment to sourcing safe, high-potency vaccines through authorised channels to protect livestock and safeguard livelihoods. He said that he was pleased with how the province is handling the FMD outbreak. “This forms part of the countrywide visits I am undertaking to the most affected provinces. Free State is also affected, but I am really impressed by how they have been managing the FMD situation. We are starting to see progress because of the proactive MEC who has taken personally in charge of the fight against FMD in this province. Our goal is to vaccinate 80% of cattle by September this year and to reduce the outbreak by 70%,” he said.

Both the minister and MEC went to Glen Agricultural College for the vaccination demonstration and a stakeholder engagement session with farmers unions.



MINISTER STEENHUISEN APPEALS FOR UNITY AND COOPERATION WITH DAIRY FARMERS TO COMBAT FMD CRISIS

Innocent Mhlanga



The department plans to vaccinate 80% of the national herd by end of December.

“National unity and cooperation are key to achieving an FMD-free status with vaccination and FMD-free status without vaccination, and such achievement requires total cooperation between farmers and the State,” said Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen.

Minister Steenhuisen made the comment after conducting a symbolic FMD vaccination on dairy cows at a farm in uMngeni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) on Friday, 27 February 2026. The KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development provided the province's promising FMD status report, which showed some improvement in tackling the FMD crisis.

During the farmers and stakeholders' engagement session, the minister faced a barrage of questions from visibly angry and frustrated farmers who complained about their dairy businesses facing imminent collapse.

Debbie Stratford from Stratford Dairy in Mooi River, which produces about 3 500 litres of milk at one of their four farms, said that three of their farms have been affected. “This virus does not only affect the animals, but the people are also affected. “I wrote to the minister in August 2024 warning that the outbreak was on its way to our shores, we need help, and we have not received the help on time,” Debbie stated.

Dove Moberly, another dairy farmer near uMzimkhulu, described the outbreak as horrific. He said that about 800 of his 1 200 cows were infected and 500 were severely affected. “After hearing of an outbreak nearby, I attempted to secure vaccines, only to learn that the State stock in not available. “I then sourced the Botswana vaccine privately, but the process required

authorisation from the national office and Allerton Provincial Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg, which resulted in a 10-day delay and a four-day wait after officials forgot to get the vaccines.”

When responding to the farmers' concerns, Minister Steenhuisen mentioned that the visit to KZN was to kickstart the national FMD mass vaccination roll-out after receiving one million Biogénesis Bagó vaccines from Argentina. The minister appealed for patience from farmers and assured them that before the end of March, the country would have received a total of 13,5 million vaccines and that the plan to vaccinate 80% of the national herd by end of December 2026 was on track and even more realistic. He further indicated that when the country achieves an FMD-free status, with or without the vaccination, the department would update the World Organization on Animal Health (WOAH) from which countries obtain FMD reports, apply for FMD-free status, and reapply with international trading partners to resume trade.

On 1 March 2026, three days after the minister's visit to KZN, the department received an additional 1,5 million Dollvet vaccines from Turkey and further strengthened the minister's view that the constant supply of vaccines from various global suppliers put the department on a path to control and break the backbone of FMD. He assured farmers that the vaccine distribution will be guided by the heatmap and will be done in a descending order from the worst to the least affected provinces. As the epicentre of FMD, KZN will receive the bulk of the vaccines.

The minister stated that with millions more doses scheduled to arrive in the coming months, the ministry and the department remain laser-focused on suppressing viral circulation. He further said that the arrival of the Dollvet vaccines is another win in the war against FMD and that capitalising on agents like Dunevax will be proof enough that the department is willing to work with any partner who can help the country and farmers to protect the herd. He added that the focus is on action and results to continue to deal with every outbreak until South Africa is FMD free.

“Going forward, we will increase the capacity of the ARC in terms of budget, lab technology and human personnel so that we can have a home-developed solution, stockpile vaccines and solely depend on our internal solution. We will be ready to solve future FMD outbreaks as they happen and prevent them from reaching the current crisis level,” concluded Minister Steenhuisen.

The department will continue to provide updates as these new doses are rolled out to the provinces to bolster the existing vaccination campaign.



EMPOWERED WOMEN EMPOWER OTHER WOMEN

“I am also inspired to become a farmer; I know that livestock farming is a business, and one is able to support their families and many improve the economy of the country.”

Kedibone Ellen Kgoro of Kubukwena Farming is a true testament that empowered women empower other people. She is in the process of building a training centre on her farm to train people who are interested in agriculture. She has also allocated half a hectare on her Ganspan Farm to 10 matriculants from the local community to plant spinach, which they sell to the local Spar and the community. Kedibone's passion towards empowering other people in farming also falls perfectly in line with this year's International Women's Day theme, "Give to gain".

"It is upon us as women to ensure that our families and communities are well fed," said Kedibone. She used to farm on communal land with 90 cattle before applying to lease State Land. In 2013, Kedibone received a 2 140-ha farm in Barkly West in Northern Cape which she is leasing from the State for 30 years. In 2025, she acquired a 556-ha farm in Ganspan, also in Northern Cape through blended finance from the Land Bank. On the farm in Ganspan, she practices mixed farming: livestock



Kedibone received tractors and other farming implements from the department.

Rony Moremi

farming with cattle, sheep and goats and crop production. She plants lucerne which she sells to animal feed manufacturers and pecan nut trees while on the other farm in Barkly West, she also practices livestock farming with cattle, sheep and goats and plants lucerne as well.

Kedibone says she was inspired by her grandfather who was a livestock farmer, because he was able to pay for their school fees through money from farming with livestock. "I learned that, "Ihumo le mo temong", there is wealth in agriculture," said Kedibone.

She received implements such as tractors and production inputs from the Northern Cape Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform. She is also building an overnight dam through Comprehensive Agricultural Producer Support (CASP) funding. She also attended a one-year business development training in Sustainable Agriculture through the University of Free State in 2022 organised by the Provincial Department of Agriculture.

Kedibone won a recognition award in the smallholder farmer category from the former Minister of Agriculture, Thoko Didiza, and she has now progressed to commercial level. She currently employs four permanent and eight seasonal employees. Ofentse, one of Kedibone's farm assistants, says his life has improved a lot since he started working on the farm. "I am also inspired to become a farmer; I know that livestock farming is a business, and one is able to support their families and many improve the economy of the country."

Kedibone says farming is no easy feat as one must grapple with challenges such as stock theft and water infrastructure. She adds that since the installation of cameras on their farms, and help from farming organisations, livestock theft has declined.



Kedibone says it is important for farmers to observe biosecurity measures to protect their livestock.



DOA SUPPORTS GUMBU SEED BANK IN OVERCOMING OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES



DoA DARD Vhembe District officials together with farmers of Gumbu seed bank during the engagement meeting.

Samuel Kgatla

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) has pledged to assist the Gumbu seed bank in addressing the challenges affecting its operations. DoA visited the community seed bank on 11 February 2026 to engage the farmers on challenges they are facing. The support is expected to strengthen seed preservation efforts, improve food security, and enhance agricultural sustainability in the community.

A community seed bank such as Gumbu provides a practical solution for improving access to, availability of and the safeguarding of seeds. It is a collective agreement among farmers to conserve crop varieties that are important to them, document indigenous knowledge on how these crops are grown, prepared and used, and exchange seeds within their communities. Established in 2016, the Gumbu project is one of three community seed banks in South Africa. The other two are located in Sterkspruit in Eastern Cape and Jericho in North West.

The project, which is managed by women farmers, is currently experiencing significant challenges related to water supply and cable theft. As a result of these issues, the project no longer has access to running water, which has severely disrupted its operations. In response to these challenges, the farmers approached DoA, Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (LDARD), and the Vhembe District Municipality to request intervention and support. DoA through the Directorate: Genetic Resources was able to secure funding to repair the water pump and replace the stolen electricity cables.

Ms Johanna Mudau, chairperson of the Gumbu seed bank expressed appreciation to all spheres of government for visiting their project and engaging with them on their challenges. She highlighted water scarcity as their most pressing concern explaining that it has prevented them from planting. "Many people rely on us for seed, but our biggest challenge is water. If this issue can be resolved, we will be able to operate effectively. I am appealing to Government for assistance with the installation of water pipes and drip irrigation systems to ensure smooth and sustainable operations," she said.

Ms Mpolokeng Mokoena from D: Genetic Resources said the Gumbu seed bank has positioned South Africa as a leader in the preservation and production of unique traditional seeds. She emphasised the importance of the seed bank, noting that both national and provincial governments are committed to supporting the project. "I want to appreciate Gumbu farmers for their patience, acknowledging ongoing communication regarding the challenges they face. We have managed to secure funding and plans are in place to address some of these challenges by the end of May 2026," she said.

DoA, LDARD and the Vhembe District reaffirmed their commitment to continue supporting the Gumbu community seed bank.



DOA STRENGTHENS FARMERS AND EXTENSION OFFICERS WITH SEED SYSTEMS KNOWLEDGE



Ms Angie Dibiloane demonstrating the indigenous seeds to farmers of Mopani at Ndhambi Village.



Farmers of Mopani had a fruitful engagement with DoA officials during the workshop at Ndhambi Village.

Samuel Kgatla

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) equipped agricultural advisors with knowledge about seed systems in South Africa during an information-sharing workshop held at Makwarela in Thohoyandou and Ndhambi Village outside Giyani in Limpopo on 10 and 12 February 2026.

The workshop aimed to capacitate agricultural extension and advisory officers from the Mopani and Vhembe districts with indigenous knowledge and practices to better support local farmers. The focus of the engagements was to highlight the importance of community seed banks and their role in preserving indigenous crops, enhancing food security, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Issues relating to seed collection, certification, production, traditional seed fairs and traditional food fairs were discussed in detail with farmers and agricultural advisors in both districts. Farmers were also informed about the importance of receiving training to become certified seed producers. DoA emphasised the need for promotion, awareness, conservation, and the sustainable use of neglected and underutilised species. Currently, the DoA operates three fully functional community seed banks in South Africa, located in Gumbu (Limpopo), Sterkspruit (Eastern Cape) and Jericho (North West).

DoA continues to conduct information sharing workshops in all provinces where seed banks have been established. The programme has already commenced in Limpopo and will be rolled out to Mpumalanga and Free State. Community seed banks provide farmers with an opportunity to actively participate in research initiatives, thereby empowering them and strengthening their control over natural resources. These seed banks also promote the ownership, preservation and documentation of traditional knowledge and skills related to seed conservation and sustainable agricultural practices.

Dr Noluthando Netnou-Nkoana from Directorate: Genetic Resources noted that there is growing interest in traditional seeds, but many people do not know where to access reliable information about them. She emphasised that the information provided through the workshops will be highly beneficial to extension officers, who work closely with farmers. "I know that sharing this knowledge will strengthen the capacity of agricultural advisors. Communities must benefit from seed banks, and increased promotion and awareness campaigns are necessary to ensure people know about and make use of these resources," she said.

Mr Tebogo Thobakgale acknowledged that the workshop was relevant and important to him as an agricultural advisor in the Mopani District, based at Ga-Mokwakwaila Village. "I am happy that DoA officials continue to host these workshops to inform us about the seed systems in South Africa. I am going to empower the farmers who are working with me," he said.

Ms Terra Malatji, a farmer from Mopani who attended the workshop, commended the department for empowering local farmers. "The workshop has been very informative and we have been encouraged to share our seeds and collaborate as farmers. We are grateful for the continued support from the national and provincial governments and look forward to more initiatives like this," she said.

DoA is implementing Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) within community seed banks in Limpopo, Eastern Cape and North West. PPB is an inclusive approach that actively engages farmers in the plant breeding process, enabling them to contribute to and make decisions at various stages of variety development.



PRODUCTION ESTIMATES FOR THE FIRST PRODUCTION FORECAST OF 2025/26 SUMMER CROPS AND FINAL ESTIMATE OF THE 2025 WINTER CEREAL CROPS



Maize harvest is expected to decline slightly to 16,126 million tons, down 3,15% from the 2024/25 summer season.

Rony Moremi

The Crop Estimates Committee released the final production estimates for the 2025 winter cereal crops and first production forecast for the 2025/26 summer crops. The estimates for the 2025 winter cereal crops show mixed movements across crops when compared with last season's estimates. Wheat production is forecast at 1,897 million tons, reflecting a slight decrease of 1,70% or 32 780 tons from the previous season's crop of 1,930 million tons.

While Western Cape, representing 52% of total wheat production, shows a decrease of 8,16% or 87 100 tons from the previous season forecast to 980 100 tons, increases in production have been recorded in Free State and Northern Cape. Northern Cape production is at 300 000 tons (representing 16% of total wheat production), which is 0,57% or 1 700 tons more than the previous seasons crop of 298 300 tons, while in Free State, the production is 265 050 tons (representing 14% of total wheat production), which is 17,66% or 39 790 tons more than the previous season's crop of 225 260 tons.

The area estimate for wheat for 2025 is 517 300 ha, with an estimated 363 000 ha or 70% planted in Western Cape, 57 000 ha or 11% in Free State and 40 000 ha or 8% in Northern Cape.

For other crops such as barley, the production estimate has been revised downward by 6,94% or 25 820 tons to 346 430 tons, compared to the previous season, while the canola sector continues its strong upward trend. The 2025 crop is estimated at 309 035 tons, representing an increase of 6,42% or 18 635 tons compared to the previous season's crop of 290 400 tons. It is still the largest canola crop on record, indicating significant year-on-year growth.

Oat production increased by 4,02% or 1 743 tons to 45 143

tons, compared to last season. Sweet lupines, however, recorded a 7,03% or 1 350 tons decrease to 17 850 tons, marking another downward adjustment from previous expectations.

Overall, the winter cereal landscape reflects strong canola performance, moderate wheat and barley reductions, and steady oats, offering a balanced but cautious outlook for the 2025 season.

South Africa's first production forecast for the 2025/26 summer grain season paints a picture of optimism in expanded plantings, tempered by uneven production outcomes. While farmers have committed more land to most major crops, seasonal conditions and yield performance are shaping a mixed outlook for the year ahead.

For the 2025/26 summer grain season, farmers planted 2,716 million hectares which is a 4,60% increase from last season. Yet, despite this expansion, the total maize harvest is expected to decline slightly to 16,126 million tons, down 3,15% from the 2024/25 summer season.

White maize plantings rose to 1,645 million hectares, with production approaching up to 8,510 million tons (+0,70%). For yellow maize, the planted area expanded by 7,47% to 1,072 million ha, but production is forecasted to fall to 7,617 million tons (-7,11%), reflecting weaker yields despite larger plantings.

The planted area for summer crops such as sunflower seed is up by 2,50% and production climbed to 754 475 tons (+7,78%). Plantings for soya beans increased to 1,212 million hectares, but output is expected to drop to 2,661 million tons (-4,95%). Groundnut plantings declined to 44 450 hectares, representing a decrease of 7,64% (3 675 ha) compared to last season's 48 125 hectares. However, production is expected to increase slightly to





Cont from pg 9.

65 238 tons, up 2,98% (1 888 tons) from the previous season's 63 350 tons. The anticipated yield is 1,47 t/ha.

The area planted for sorghum increased marginally by 0,85% (350 ha) to 41 500 hectares, compared to the 41 150 hectares last season. Production, however, is forecast to decline to 131 888 tons, which is 12,08% (18 113 tons) lower than the 150 000 tons harvested in the previous season. The expected yield is 3,18 t/ha.

Dry bean plantings are estimated at 40 400 hectares, a decrease of 11,44% (5 220 ha) from the 45 620 hectares planted last season.

Production is forecast at 78 594 tons, which is 13,21% (11 962 tons) lower than the 90 556 tons produced in the previous season. The expected yield is 1,95 t/ha.

According to this first production forecast for the 2025/26 summer crops, sunflowers and white maize are expected to deliver modest gains, while yellow maize, soya beans, sorghum and dry beans face downward pressure.



FARMERS URGED TO PRIORITISE SOIL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES



Farmers enjoyed listening to soil scientists from ARC during the awareness event in Klerksdorp.



Soil scientists showing farmers on how to test soil at Witpoort Farm in Nort West.

Samuel Kgatla

Farmers gained insight into the importance of soil testing, soil profile descriptions, and sustainable regenerative agriculture production systems during the Regenerative Agriculture Production Systems Workshop. These practices enable farmers to better understand their soil conditions, apply the correct inputs, and adopt farming methods that enhance productivity while safeguarding the land for future generations.

Mr Klaas Mampholo from the Directorate: Land Use and Soil Management encouraged farmers in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality to prioritise proper soil management practices to ensure sufficient food production for the nation. He made this announcement during the Sustainable Regenerative Agriculture Production Systems awareness event held at Witpoort Farm in Klerksdorp on 5 March 2026. The main purpose of this event held under the theme, "Soil health solution right where you farm", was to enlighten farmers about the importance of soil and the correct inputs to apply on it.

The event brought together farmers, agricultural stakeholders and experts to share knowledge and practical approaches to regenerative and Conservation Agriculture (CA) practices that improve soil health, productivity and sustainability. The awareness session focused on helping farmers understand how proper soil management, soil testing and sustainable farming practices could improve crop production while protecting the environment for future generations.

Mr Mampholo further emphasised that farmers must be celebrated for the vital role they play in feeding the nation. He encouraged farmers to adapt to changing times and adopt new approaches in agriculture to prosper. He mentioned that agriculture continues to evolve daily, and farmers must adapt to these changes to remain productive and sustainable. "Farmers

should work in harmony with nature, as success in agriculture begins with the farmer. The responsibility of the agricultural sector is to feed the more than 64 million people living in South Africa and increasing food production starts with empowering and supporting farmers," he said.

He also pointed out that provinces have resources available to assist farmers, particularly with soil testing, which he described as the first and most important step in service delivery to farmers. Mr Mampholo further urged farmers to prepare themselves and change the way they farm in response to climate change.

Mr Kenny Nthangeni, a soil scientist from North West Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, highlighted the importance of soil testing so that farmers can better understand their soil and determine what crops are suitable to plant on it. "Our main problems associated with low soil fertility in sub-Saharan Africa are erratic rainfall, environmental degradation and low organic matter content. Several factors must be considered when correcting soil infertility. These include nutrient deficiency, nutrient imbalance, toxicity and the need to correct soil pH levels," he said.

Mr Frank Sekonyela of Witpoort Farm encouraged farmers to understand their soil and adopt sustainable farming systems that support productivity and resilience. "We can turn the challenges of climate change into positives. We must remain positive and appreciate the support we receive from Government. Crop and livestock production go together and help us sustain ourselves," he said.

Mr Sekonyela is practicing mixed farming, which combines crops and livestock for diversified production. This approach often increases resilience against climate variability, spreads economic risk, and can improve long-term sustainability through techniques such as CA.



AGROECOLOGY: FARMING WITH NATURE

Mercia Smith



Ms Mmakgabo Matlou, a soil science researcher at the ARC, Institute for Soil, Climate and Water, explaining the agroecology practices such as no-till method.

Climate change is an established scientific reality. According to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2015 to 2025 has been the warmest decade on record, with sea levels rising by approximately 3 mm per year. Small-scale farmers are vulnerable to climate change due to limited resources and their reliance on rain-fed agriculture.

For this reason, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) organised an Agroecology Farmers Awareness Day at ARC-VIMP in Roodeplaat to create awareness about agroecology. Farmers from various provinces attended to learn more about agroecology. Unlike conventional farming, which primarily focuses on profitability, agroecology takes a comprehensive approach to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change, while simultaneously addressing the social needs of communities. It is an approach that applies the relationship between plants, animals, humans and social principles.

"For South African farmers, agroecology, which integrates principles of agronomy and ecology, offers a promising pathway toward establishing more profitable and resilient agricultural systems," said Mr Joseph Kau, an agricultural economist at the ARC. Agroecology is about designing and managing sustainable food and farming systems. It is an approach that applies both ecological and social principles.

Agroecology systems are designed from the ground up, with people at the centre. Key strategies include reducing reliance on synthetic inputs by enhancing soil organic matter, cultivating indigenous crops, and adding value through agro-processing. The ARC provides training and access to resources to support farmers in adopting these methods.

Ecological practices such as building soil fertility, crop diversification, the use of cover crops, agroforestry and vermicomposting were discussed on the awareness day. Instead of using artificial fertilisers, farmers could use organic matter like

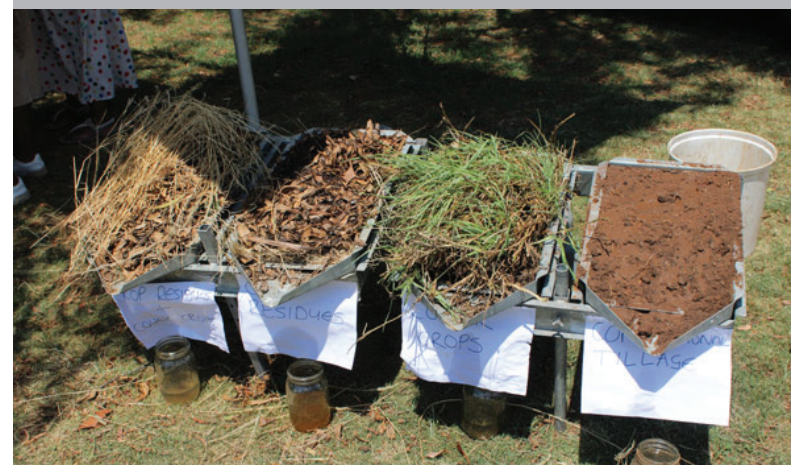
compost and manure. Using earthworms to break down organic matter produces nutrient-rich compost, further reducing the need for chemical fertilisers. They should deviate from monoculture and use practices such as intercropping and crop rotation.

Economic practices include growing indigenous crops, adding value through agro-processing and targeting niche markets. South Africa's indigenous crops, such as African leafy vegetables and rooibos, are in high demand, both locally and internationally. Farmers can also increase their income by processing their raw produce into higher-value products. Examples include dried snacks made from indigenous crops.

Farmers had the opportunity to visit various exhibitions and demonstrations such as beekeeping, Conservation Agriculture, no till, mulching, water harvesting, aquaponics and the use of wetlands for water purification.



William Makobe explaining that agroecology systems are designed from the ground up, with people at the centre.



Plant residue acts as a crucial protective layer for the soil during hard rain.



DOA CONSULT STAKEHOLDERS ON DRAFT PLANT HEALTH REGULATIONS



Plant health stakeholders met to make inputs on Draft Plant Health Regulations.

Samuel Kgatla

Scientists and researchers in the plant health industry gathered at the Birchwood Hotel in Boksburg from 25 to 27 February 2026 to provide input and comments on the Draft Plant Health Regulations under the Plant Health Act (Phytosanitary Act), 2024 (Act No. 35 of 2024). The workshop was hosted by the National Department of Agriculture (DoA) through the National Plant Protection Organisation of South Africa (NPPOZA). The primary objective of the engagement was to strengthen South Africa's biosecurity systems and address gaps in the existing regulatory framework governing plant health and phytosanitary measures.

The regulations focus on preventing the introduction and spread of regulated plant pests and strengthening control on the movement of plants and plant products into, within, and out of South Africa. The Phytosanitary Act (signed into law in December 2024) modernises South Africa's plant biosecurity by replacing the Agricultural Pests Act, 1983 (Act No. 36 of 1983). It establishes the NPPOZA and focuses on controlling, detecting and preventing the spread of regulated pests to protect agriculture. It provides for phytosanitary measures to prevent the introduction, establishment and spread of regulated pests in South Africa.

The workshop also reinforced that protecting plant resources is not only an environmental priority, but an economic imperative. Strong biosecurity frameworks underpin safe trade, safeguard market access and build confidence among trading partners by demonstrating compliance with international standards. Key issues relating to the draft national control measures as well as export and import regulations were thoroughly dealt with during robust breakaway sessions, allowing participants to clarify technical provisions, address implementation challenges, and propose practical improvements to strengthen the overall regulatory framework.

Stakeholders in the agricultural sector welcomed the Draft Plant Health Regulations, describing them as a positive step toward improving clarity and compliance in trade processes.

Mr Bernardus Henning from the Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB) commended the department for its work in developing the regulations. "Everything is looking good, and it is well laid out, and once everything is finalised, it is going to be a solid document. People will start knowing what to carry when it comes to imports and exports," he said.

Mr Stefan Links from Forestry South Africa echoed the same sentiment and welcomed the new Phytosanitary Act and the associated regulations being promulgated. "We believe the Act and associated regulations provide a clearer mandate and more fitting scope to ensure that the NPPOZA has a more appropriate legislative framework." The Border Management Authority deputy assistant commissioner, Ernest Phoku, said the regulations will provide clarity and ensure compliance with import and export standards. He added that the BMA is always ready to work with the department on the Plant Health Regulations.

Mr Jan Hendrik Venter, director at the Directorate: Plant Health, emphasised that the workshop focused on strengthening plant health systems through inclusive stakeholder engagement. "We need collaborative efforts like this one to move the industry forward. We appreciate everyone's contribution, as this is not an easy task. We will continue reviewing and improving regulations as new developments emerge and the environment keeps changing. Our goal is to develop and diversify our import and export standards," he said.

