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# SOUTH AFRICA ACCELERATING TRADE PROMOTION TO HIGH POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE MARKETS

## TOP NEWS

p5 DEPARTMENT AND PARTNERS CONVENED HIGH-LEVEL INDABA TO TACKLE FMD OUTBREAKS

p6 MINISTER PLEADS FOR MORE YOUNG WOMEN FARMERS IN THE SECTOR

p7 REGULATIONS ON THE NAMING OF MEAT ALTERNATIVES

p9 SOUTH AFRICA HOSTS ZAMBIAN DELEGATION FOR BENCHMARKING ON CANNABIS

p10 POLLINATORS OF PROSPERITY, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEE FARMING

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# FROM THE MINISTER'S DESK

This August has been a particularly demanding and busy month for all of us. It has brought significant challenges, most notably the 30% tariff imposed by the United States on some of our key agricultural exports. This is a considerable hurdle that has demanded our immediate and undivided attention.

We have also been called upon to address serious governance concerns within the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC), taking decisive action to ensure transparency and integrity. At the same time, we have been deeply engaged in celebrating Women's Month, a time to honor and uplift the remarkable women who are the backbone of our agricultural sector. It is in this context of managing new tariffs, upholding good governance, and celebrating our women, that I present this month's message.

**The Way Forward After US Tariffs: Diversification Is Our Plan A**

The recent imposition of a 30% tariff by the United States on some of our exports demands a clear and decisive response. The big lesson for us is the urgent need to diversify our export markets and enhance our competitiveness. This is not a plan B; it is our plan A for long-term resilience.

South Africa cannot afford to be over-reliant on any single market. While the US market accounts for about 4% of our total agricultural exports – a value of R9,8 billion that has grown by 104% since 2018 – this growth is now under threat. This is not just about trade numbers; it is directly linked to job protection. Over-reliance on a single market leaves key industries like citrus, wine, nuts and ostrich exposed.

My department and I have identified several priority regions for expansion, including Asia, the Middle East and India. We are targeting markets like Japan, Vietnam, Thailand and the Gulf states, where we see growing demand and a positive reception of South African products. I can also announce that South Africa has secured production protocols with China for five stone fruit products, i.e., apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums and prunes.

The intention is to sign this protocol in September on the side-lines of the G20 Summit. This marks the first time South Africa has negotiated more than one production agreement with China, opening the door to a massive export market and new opportunities for our farmers.

We are also committed to strengthening our relationships with our European and African markets, particularly under the African Continental Trade Area (AfCFTA), to build regional resilience.

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Cont from pg 2.

To achieve this, we are deploying dedicated infrastructure for market expansion, including agricultural attachés and increased export certification capacity.

We are also engaging our American counterparts through all available channels. I have established a high-level negotiation team, led by Director-General Mooketsa Ramasodi, to engage with the US. We have already made significant progress in addressing some of their sanitary and phytosanitary concerns, demonstrating our commitment to being a reliable trading partner. We will continue to do everything necessary to keep this market open, as the United States remains a vital trade partner.

**Upholding Good Governance in the SAVC Election**

I have taken firm steps to address governance concerns arising from the recent South African Veterinary Council (SAVC) election. Serious concerns have been raised about the transparency and procedural integrity of the election, including inconsistent communications and questions about candidate eligibility.

**Acting within my oversight mandate, I have:**

- requested a full report and legal advice on the validity of the election;
- informed the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture in Parliament of the concerns; and
- formally requested the Registrar to initiate a process to restart the veterinary part of the election.

Good governance is not optional, it is foundational. Public confidence in statutory regulatory bodies, such as the SAVC, rests on transparent, credible and procedurally fair processes. My actions are intended to ensure that these standards are upheld without compromise. I reiterate my commitment to working with stakeholders to restore trust and ensure future elections reflect the highest standards of accountability.

**Celebrating Women Who Feed Our Nation**

August is Women's Month, a time to honor the strength, courage and brilliance of the women who shape our nation. I want to shine a special light on the women in agriculture. Too often, the image that comes to mind when we speak about farmers is not female. Yet, every day, from the Orange River to Eastern Cape, it is women who are tilling the soil, growing our food, sustaining rural economies and holding entire communities together.

These are not stories of charity; they are stories of power. Take Ellen Kaweng, a farmer in Northern Cape who started with just four head of cattle and now runs a diverse farming operation with over 400 animals. Or Siphesihle Kwetana who produces more than 280 000 seedlings a week and supplies major retailers, all while employing over 30 people, mostly women and youth. These women show us what happens when they are given access to land, support and markets.

My department's commitment to empowering women in the agricultural value chain remains unwavering. We recognise that access to land is only the beginning. That is why we prioritise women in every aspect of farmer support: from production inputs and infrastructure to extension services, market access and financing. Through programmes like CASP, Ilima/Letsema and the Agro-Fund, we ensure that women who acquire land are not left unsupported. We are working to build inclusive value chains where the woman planting the seed can also have a stake in the packaging, logistics and pricing.

To the women of South African agriculture, we celebrate you. But more than that, we commit to standing with you, not just in August, but in every season. You are the architects of hope, the custodians of resilience, and the ones who turn seeds into sustenance, hardship into harvests, and dreams into food security.

Let's continue to work together to serve our agricultural stakeholders.

*Minister Steenhuisen addressing the Agri Western Cape Congress, emphasising the theme, Power of Commitment.*

*Minister Steenhuisen was the guest speaker at the Frontier Bonsmara Farmers Day in Eastern Cape.*

# SOUTH AFRICA ACCELERATING TRADE PROMOTION TO HIGH POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE MARKETS

> **"We are accelerating trade promotion to high-potential alternative markets in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe"**

*Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen and Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition, Mr Parks Tau.*

Mercia Smith

The recent 30% unilateral tariff imposed by the US on South African exports marks a major policy change, prompting South Africa to respond by intensifying efforts to diversify its export markets and boost competitiveness. These tariffs, introduced under US President Donald Trump, are notable for breaking with the rule-based global trade system established in 1945.

Mr John Steenhuisen, Minister of Agriculture and Mr Parks Tau, Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition, held a joint press briefing in Pretoria on 12 August 2025. Government has been implementing a response anchored on five key elements, and the press briefing provided an update on progress on these key elements:

i) Continued engagement with the United States to secure a deal and reduce the tariffs;

ii) Diversification of exports to alternate markets;

iii) An economic response package to vulnerable companies and workers;

iv) Trade defence against import surge and dumping; and

v) Demand side interventions.

Cabinet has approved a revised trade offer which have been submitted on Tuesday, 12 August 2025 as part of the government's five-point response to the 30% unilateral tariff. According to Minister Steenhuisen, it is a "generous" revised trade offer to the United States, in response to the reciprocal tariffs imposed on South Africa.

South Africa has already addressed sanitary and phytosanitary measures in compliance with the biosecurity protocols affecting:

i) poultry: South Africa granted market access under the conditional self-ban and self-lifting system. This will ensure that the US can leverage the Tariff Rate Quota of 72 000 tons already agreed to in 2016.

ii) blueberries: granted market access for states that are free of fruit fly and agreed to mitigation measures with those states with fruit fly; and

iii) pork: which is open subject to the biosecurity requirements.

"Consequently, the USA-Africa Trade Desk has informed us that it will be shipping containers of poultry and pork to South Africa in two weeks, which is testimony that these issues have been resolved. These shipments will come from the states of Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina and Alabama through the Port of New Orleans.

These are challenging times, but also an opportunity to reinforce South Africa's competitiveness and deepen South Africa's global trade relationships. "We are accelerating trade promotion to high-potential alternative markets in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe," Minister Parks Tau said.

Both ministers concluded that South Africa's response to the tariff increase is multi-pronged, balancing vigorous engagement with the US, economic relief at home and market diversification abroad. The overall goal is to achieve a trade deal that respects South Africa's national interests while strengthening its partnership with the US.

*South Africa is accelerating trade promotion to high-potential alternative markets in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.*

# DEPARTMENT AND PARTNERS CONVENED HIGH-LEVEL INDABA TO TACKLE FMD OUTBREAKS

**"This must be the start of something to bring stability and hope. We commend a call by the minister to regionalise the vaccination and we commit to work in full collaboration with Government. Let us build together"**

*Minister John Steenhuisen and Deputy Minister Zoleka Capa during the Foot and mouth disease Indaba at Agricultural Research Council (ARC) Campus in Roodeplaat.*

**Samuel Kgatla**

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) in collaboration with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and industry partners showed commitment in response to Foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks in South Africa. This comes after a successful FMD Indaba was held at Roodeplaat, Pretoria, from 21 to 22 July 2025. The intention of the two-day event was for veterinary experts, farmers and industry partners to deliberate on and develop tangible long-term solutions to combat FMD. The resurgence of the disease has resulted in livestock movement restrictions and has also significantly impacted the country's red meat trade on international markets.

As of July 2025, approximately 270 outbreaks have been reported across five provinces in South Africa. Of these, 249 outbreaks remain unresolved, while 21 have undergone resolution. Eastern Cape has recorded 40 outbreaks, with 38 still open and two resolved. There have been no new reported cases in Eastern Cape since September 2024. KwaZulu-Natal has been the most affected province, with 191 reported outbreaks, of which 172 remain active and 19 have been resolved. Since May 2025, Gauteng has reported 32 outbreaks, North West has four open outbreaks, while Mpumalanga has reported three outbreaks. Outbreaks have been ongoing since 2021, with periods of quiet and periods of the disease spreading. Minister John Steenhuisen said the Indaba is not about apportioning blame. It is about fixing what has gone wrong and building a system which can withstand the next outbreak, and the one after that. "To ensure that these outcomes of this Indaba are not just aspirational but actionable, I will be appointing a dedicated team immediately after this gathering to consolidate the proposals and insights shared here today. This team will be tasked with finalising a practical, time-bound operational plan, one that reflects both the urgency of our challenge and the collective wisdom in this room. That plan will be presented to me within a defined timeframe and will serve as the blueprint for our implementation going forward," he said.

The minister also emphasised the importance of traceability and tracking systems in curbing the spread of FMD.

Mr Dewald Olivier, chief executive officer at Read Meat Industry Services (RMIS) mentioned that Government cannot fight FMD alone, but it needs support from its entities. He said they are ready for collaborative efforts. "This must be the start of something to bring stability and hope. We commend a call by the minister to regionalise the vaccination and we commit to work in full collaboration with Government. Let us build together," he said. Other industries' representatives affected by FMD also pledged to work with the government.

The department has committed to continue implementing strict biosecurity measures, controlling animal movement, and conducting surveillance and vaccination programmes. The Indaba comprised of three breakaway sessions focusing on declaring FMD endemic, abandoning all control efforts, maintaining the current control strategies and a progressive control pathway to eventually regain FMD-free zone status. The report with recommendations is expected to be submitted to the department's director-general within a week from the Indaba and then to the minister. The Indaba underscored the urgent need for animal identification and traceability.

*Minister John Steenhuisen was supported by four MECs of Provincial Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development.*

# MINISTER PLEADS FOR MORE YOUNG WOMEN FARMERS IN THE SECTOR

*Minister John Steenhuisen with learners from Dr Böhmer School of Skills in Bloemfontein.*

*Minister John Steenhuisen with some female farmers in Bloemfontein.*

**Samuel Kgatla**

The Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, is pleading for more young women to participate in the agricultural sector. The minister mentioned this during his Women's Month Outreach Programme in Bloemfontein, Free State on 19 August 2025. He visited the Dr Böhmer School of Skills, Rosemead and Swartkoppies farms in the province as part of celebrating Women's Month. The minister visited Dr Böhmer School of Skills because of its agricultural programme, which includes agriculture as a subject to teach learners, including those with disabilities on how to grow chickens and what to do once eggs have been laid. It is also a small-scale farm growing various vegetables and a few apricot trees.

Minister Steenhuisen also visited two resilient women farmers to see their achievements and listen to their challenges. "Young women have a role to play in the agricultural sector and they need our support. I decided to visit some of them here in Free State to see what they do on the ground," said Minister Steenhuisen.

Ms Mimie Jacobs is the owner of Rosemead Farm and an award-winning commercial farmer, business leader, and passionate advocate for women in agriculture. After a 20-year career in Johannesburg's banking sector, she transitioned into agribusiness, and is now running a 165-hectare farm. Mimie built a thriving agribusiness producing lucerne, teff and pecan nuts. Crowned Free State Female Farmer of the Year in 2016, she also founded the Free State Chamber of Commerce and serves on the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SACCI) Board. She also survived a brutal attack on her farm and she opened up to the minister about what transpired during the ordeal.

The minister also paid a courtesy visit to Swartkoppies Farm, owned by a young female farmer, Ms Tisetso Lebusa. Tisetso's farming story began as a partnership with her father in 2008, embracing a mixed-breed farm, including cattle, chickens, sheep and crops. However, the sudden loss of her parents in 2021 led her to assume full responsibility of the farm's operations. She currently has 85 cattle and works tirelessly to contribute to the agricultural sector.

The minister expressed that he was bursting with pride over the successes of both the farmers he visited. "We acknowledge the important role played by women in the agricultural space in South Africa. It was wonderful to be on the farms where women have taken the lead, and we have to encourage young Black women into farming. Our agriculture population is ageing and we need young people to get involved and what better way than to use Women's Month to highlight the incredible work done by women on the ground," he said.

Mimie said that she appreciates the minister's visit to her farm and the support she receives from the department, and her wish is to see Government assisting more female farmers. Tisetso also mentioned that the department assisted her with the provision of extension and advisory services, mentorship, how to run the farm, market access and vaccination of cattle. She added that the department's extension advisors helped her to understand that agriculture is a business and she has learned a lot from them.

*Female farmers from Free State were happy to engage with Minister John Steenhuisen.*

# DEPARTMENT SHOWCASES PRODUCTIVE CITRUS PACKHOUSES

*Some workers of Morone Packhouse outside Burgersfort in Limpopo.*

*Deputy Minister Zoleka Capa on the left visited the Naranja Citrus Packhouse in Limpopo.*

**Samuel Kgatla**

In a mission to profile and showcase the operations in the citrus packhouses, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) visited four productive citrus packhouses around Burgersfort and Ohrigstad in Limpopo. The department, led by Deputy Minister Zoleka Capa and accompanied by Head of the Department of Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Mpho Abigail Mashamba, visited the Naranja Packhouse on 5 August 2025. Naranja is one of South Africa's largest and most successful citrus packhouses. The goal of these visits was to understand the practices, challenges and contributions of these packhouses within the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the visit formed part of the department's efforts to strengthen hygiene standards and enhance food safety and phytosanitary standards and, over and above, to support the growth of the citrus value chain as required by the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan. The officials also visited Morone, Mahela and JP Landgoed packhouses in the Fetakgomo Tubatse Local Municipality.

The citrus industry is crucial and a significant source of income, food security and support for many households in Burgersfort and the surrounding areas in the province. Most of the citrus go to the United Kingdom and Asian countries. Since 2000, the Sekhukhune area has seen a substantial growth in citrus production, particularly in areas like Burgersfort and Ohrigstad. Emerging and small-scale citrus growers and workers are benefiting abundantly from the packhouses in the area. The fruit packers work for 24 hours on shifts at some packhouses and the department is planning to open up a market for them in the Middle East. Workers are able to support their families through their incomes and that in itself paints a practical picture about the sector's vital role in job creation and inclusive rural development.

Limpopo produces over 40% of South Africa's citrus and supports thousands of farm workers, many of whom are seasonal or employed in packhouses. Limpopo is the largest citrus-producing province in South Africa and a major contributor to the country's agricultural economy and employment. The delegates witnessed how citrus is cleaned, sorted, graded, labelled and packaged with precision in the packhouses by the workers of whom the majority are women. South African citrus production is export orientated. The 30% tariff on South African exports to United States came into effect on 08 August, and it is going to have a negative impact on the citrus industry and others, necessitating the need for an effective marketing strategy in order to gain more markets from other potential trade blocks around the globe.

The deputy minister said rural villages and their people must be empowered in the agricultural sector. "Our partnership must include the traditional leadership. We have come to work with you and make these projects a catalyst. It is important to build sustainability and make sure that employees become employers in the future through the skills they obtained from this work. I was happy to engage with the workers here at Naranja Packhouse. The citrus industry continues to create jobs, driving rural development and boosting exports," she said.

Ms Constance Masehlela, who has been working at Mahela Packhouse for five years, said she is able to support her family of six people from the salary she gets. She also mentioned that the packhouse has helped many local people to improve their households.

Mr Francois Alwyn Venter, farm manager at JP Landgoed in Ohrigstad, said the packhouse is doing well and they are exporting tons of citrus they planted on 217 hectares for this year. "We have a variety of cultivars on the farm and we specialise in soft citrus or easy peelers. We export to different destinations including Europe. We have around 150 people working in the packhouse and we are looking forward to work with Government," he said.

# REGULATIONS ON THE NAMING OF MEAT ALTERNATIVES

Rony Moremi

If it is not meat, it cannot have a meat-related name; this is according to the new regulations published in the *Government Gazette* (R. 6436 of 18 July 2025). According to the Agricultural Product Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990), no indication of animal species' names, animal morphology or anatomy cuts names shall be allowed to be part of a meat analogue product name. Meat analogue products are also known as meat substitutes, mock meat, faux meat or imitation meat and are derived from non-meat ingredients.

Words or expressions such as chicken-style, beef-style, chick'n, b*con or any similar wording referring to animal species or meat products shall not be permitted to be marked on the container or outer container of meat analogue products.

The names under which meat analogues may be sold are hot dogs, chipolatas, bites, steaks, pops, balls rounds, pieces, tenders, burgers, patties, sausages, bangers, griller loafs, polonies, mince, roasts, schnitzels and products named according to shapes, e.g., frikkadel, wheels, discs, nuggets, rolls and sizzlers.

Meat analogue products are required to have a protein content of at least 9% if the words meat replacer or meat substitute or meat alternative or plant-based protein or plant protein, or any similar words, are indicated on the main panel.

The Department of Agriculture states that the publication of meat analogue regulations should provide the necessary clarity required for the trade of meat analogues and meat products, ensuring consumers are protected from the sale of misleading products.

"The trading environment that is responsive to consumers' requirements by differentiating between the sale of meat and meat analogue products is what these regulations are about. The sharing of common names in the sale of meat and meat analogue products signified a high level of commercial understanding of the importance of coexistence between meat analogue and meat products in the food market. On the other hand, traditional names for meat products and geographical indicators were preserved," said Billy Makhafola, Director: Food Safety and Quality Assurance at the Department of Agriculture.

# DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND SACOTA DRIVE DIGITAL SHIFT IN AGRICULTURAL TRADE

In a bid to modernise and streamline agricultural trade processes, the Department of Agriculture, in collaboration with the South African Chamber of Agricultural Trade (SACOTA), hosted a hybrid training session on 3 July 2025 focusing on the national eCert system. The session, held in Pretoria and streamed virtually, equipped stakeholders with hands-on knowledge of how to apply for import permits and e-Phytosanitary Certificates using the digital platform.

The eCert system is a key part of the department's broader strategy to strengthen trade facilitation, improve turnaround times and enhance compliance with biosecurity and international plant health standards.

The session opened with remarks from SACOTA's executive director, André van der Vyver, who highlighted the importance of efficient, transparent trade systems.

"This session forms part of our strategic drive to modernise agricultural services through digital platforms," Van der Vyver said. "Trade efficiency begins with systems that are accessible, responsive and aligned with international best practices."

Officials from the department presented the policy and technical foundations of the eCert platform. Ndivhuwo Tshisudzungwane from the Directorate: Plant Health explained the regulatory role of phytosanitary documentation in safeguarding South Africa's plant health status. Busisiwe Shomang of the Directorate: Inspections underlined how the platform would help streamline inspections and tracking. Thule Cele and Christina Makgoba, both from the Directorate: Food Import and Export Standards, noted that the system improves traceability and enhances the country's reputation in international markets.

The audience had an opportunity to go through the live demonstration of the eCert system, which was a key highlight of the session. The live demonstration were conducted by Stefan van den Berg and his technical colleagues. The walkthrough introduced stakeholders to the core functionalities of the eCert platform, aimed at reducing manual paperwork, cutting delays and improving regulatory oversight.

The demonstration included the following step-by-step segments:

**Registering as a new user:**

A guided process on how to create a personal or company user profile on the platform, ensuring secure login credentials and verified access.

**Creating your business:**

Attendees learned how to correctly input business information, contact persons and organisational details necessary for compliance and transaction tracking.

*Stakeholders listening to gain knowledge of how to apply for import permits and e-Phytosanitary Certificates using the digital platform.*

Matsepo Malatswane

**Applying for an import permit:**

Van den Berg demonstrated how to navigate the application dashboard, upload required documentation and submit a request for an import permit. He explained the approval workflow and notification features built into the system.

**Applying for a Phytosanitary Certificate:**

The demonstration showed users how to complete a certificate request, select commodities, and specify destination countries, all while complying with relevant international standards.

**Booking a phytosanitary inspection:**

Users were shown how to schedule and manage inspection bookings, including choosing dates, specifying inspection locations and receiving confirmation through the system.

"Digital transformation isn't just about introducing new tools, it is about making systems work better for people," said Van den Berg. "eCert reduces administrative burdens, saves time and supports South Africa's competitiveness in global agricultural trade."

Following the technical walkthrough, the floor was opened to SACOTA members and industry participants for an interactive question and answer session. Attendees raised practical questions regarding system access, document requirements, support channels and turnaround times.

The department urged all role players involved in the import and export of plant products to adopt the eCert system as part of their standard operating procedures. This platform aligns with global trends in digitised trade, strengthens the country's phytosanitary integrity, and ensures faster service delivery.

Stakeholders interested in registering or accessing training support for the eCert system are encouraged to contact the Directorate: Food Import and Export Standards.

# SOUTH AFRICA HOSTS ZAMBIAN DELEGATION FOR BENCHMARKING ON CANNABIS

*Deputy Director-General Dipepeneneng Serage welcoming the Zambian delegation during their visit to Agricultural Research Council (ARC).*

*From left: Mr Joseph Mahlabe from DoA, Major General Reuben Mwewa from Zambia and Prof. SO Amoo from ARC receiving a gift from Zambian delegation.*

**Samuel Kgatla**

The South African government in collaboration with its Zambian counterpart have fruitfully concluded a benchmarking bilateral visit on cannabis and hemp to Pretoria from 14 to 18 July 2025. The aim was for both countries to benchmark on cannabis and hemp products. The meeting was also to explore sustainable regulatory models and support systems for smallholder farmers and agri-processors dealing with cannabis and hemp. Furthermore, it was also to share experiences and expertise about these fast-emerging green economy products.

Cannabis in Zambia is illegal for recreational use. In December 2019, by unanimous decision, it was legalised for export and medicinal purposes only. The medicinal use of cannabis in South Africa is regulated in terms of the Medicines and Related Substances Act (Medicines Act), 1965, (Act No. 101 of 1965). It is important to note that medicinal cannabis is still a controlled substance in South Africa, and its use must be in accordance with the laws and regulations set forth by the Medicines Control Council (MCC) and South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA). This means that the possession, cultivation and distribution of medicinal cannabis without a prescription is still illegal.

According to SAHPRA, there are 114 active cannabis license holders in all the provinces. The sale, supply and use of a medicine or scheduled substance is governed by Section 22(A) of the Medicines Act (as amended) and supporting regulations. The DoA is expected to develop and implement Good Agricultural Cultivation Practices Standards, applicable to all holders of a permit to cultivate cannabis. The regulations required for the Cannabis for Private Purposes Act, 2024 (Act No. 7 of 2024), that are to be implemented, will be finalised by March 2026. This is according to Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Mmamoloko Kubayi.

The delegation also visited CBD Full Spectrum Pty Ltd in Vanderbijlpark, VitaCann Pharm Pty Ltd in Mogale City and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). CBD Full Spectrum Pty Ltd is a leading company which intends to penetrate the cannabis cultivation market in Africa. They cultivate premium hemp and cannabis strains carefully selected for their quality, potency and adaptability to African growing conditions. VitaCann Pharm also specialises in providing end-to-end cannabis services. They are a pioneering force in the cannabis and pharmaceutical industry.

Acting Chief Director for Plant Production and Health, Mr Jan-Hendrik Venter, officially welcomed the delegates, emphasising the importance of regional collaboration in unlocking the economic, medicinal and industrial potential of cannabis and hemp. “We are pleased to embark on a knowledge exchange on cannabis benchmarking exercise with Zambia. We are the pioneers of cannabis and believe that this meeting is going to help both countries. This is a reflection of our shared vision and we can agree that the cannabis sector is still relatively small, but with potential to grow,” he said.

# POLLINATORS OF PROSPERITY, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEE FARMING

*Minister John Steenhuisen received a beekeeping suit, also known as an apiarist suit from Mr Tim van Stormbroek beekeeper and environment consultant. The suit is a protective garment worn to prevent bee stings.*

*Honey comes in a wide range of colors, from nearly colourless to dark brown, all thanks to the different types of flowers the bees visit for nectar.*

Mercia Smith

Beekeeping in South Africa is a relatively young industry. The Egyptians were among the first known to practice beekeeping. They kept honeybee hives made of straw and clay, and honey was a significant part of their diet.

In South Africa, honey bees and their pollination services contribute an estimated R16 billion to the national GDP. Approximately R10 billion is generated in Western Cape, Mr Mike Allsop, senior researcher at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), said.

Pollination is key to agriculture and ecosystems, and the importance of bees was discussed at the SABIO (South Africa Bee Industry Organisation) BEECON 2025, held in Centurion from 3 to 5 July. Bees are part of the biodiversity on which we all depend for our survival.

The demand for pollination services is expected to double over the next five years, but despite their crucial value, beekeeping in South Africa faces crucial challenges, largely because of the lack of recognition and protection of these pollination services.

Although various acts and regulations exist that relate to the protection and management of bees and beekeeping in South Africa, this legislation is not enforced, and there is no capacity for honeybee disease management.

Acts administered by the Department of Agriculture and relating to bee farming are:

- Agricultural Pests Act, 1983 (Act No. 36 of 1983);
- Agricultural Product Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990); and
- Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (CARA), 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983).

One of the challenges facing beekeeping is the lack of forage. Eucalyptus plantations are removed in national alien clearing programmes, such as Working for Water. Theft and vandalism of commercial hives have become a major risk factor as hives are difficult to monitor and protect. The hives are in remote locations and many times on land not belonging to the beekeeper.

People see a hive as “fair game”, as it appears unattended or out of use. When thieves want to get access to the honey, they suffocate or drown the bees to remove the honey without being stung. A Western Cape bee farmer once found a hive closed up with mieliepap, waiting for the bees to die.

There are limited data, and crimes in the beekeeping industry are not documented. Crimes are reported in the media but have not been extensively researched in terms of their mechanisms of operation and the extent of the losses.

Cont from pg 8.

South Africa once had minimal bee pests and diseases; however, the discovery of the Cape “invader bee” (*Apis mellifera capensis*) in 1992 and the varroa mite in 1997 changed beekeeping. The Cape honeybee can engage in social parasitism, leading to colony losses for beekeepers. It has the unique ability to produce female offspring without fertilisation and can invade and take over colonies, causing them to collapse.

The irresponsible spraying of pesticides can result in severe localised impacts to honeybee colonies, Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, Operations and Stewardship Manager at CropLife said.

Any person who keeps, owns or is in charge of a colony of honeybees, whether commercial, as a hobbyist, or as a bee removal service provider, is legally required to annually register with the Department of Agriculture. This is following the control measures cited in the Agricultural Pests Act (Act No. 36 of 1983), Mr Joel Mamabolo, Director: Animal Production at the Department of Agriculture, said.

Honey bees are vital for both the sweet honey we enjoy and for the pollination of many of the fruit, vegetables and other crops that we rely on for food. Honey comes in a wide range of colours, from nearly colourless to dark brown, all thanks to the different types of flowers the bees feed on for nectar. Honey that has not been extracted yet refers to honey that is still contained within the honeycomb cells of the beehive that has not been separated from the wax and comb.

Their pollination services are essential for maintaining biodiversity and ensuring food security. Beeswax is a natural byproduct of honey production, making it a sustainable and renewable resource. Beeswax candles burn cleaner, longer and brighter than other candles. They improve air quality, emit a natural honey scent and are hypoallergenic, sustainable and handcrafted.

To support bees and their vital role as pollinators, individuals can take several actions, including planting bee-friendly flowers, reducing pesticide use, supporting local beekeepers and raising awareness about the importance of bees. These actions can contribute to healthier bee populations and help ensure the continued pollination of crops and wild plants.

Minister John Steenhuisen received a beekeeping suit, also known as an apiarist suit from Mr Tim van Stormbroek, beekeeper and environmental consultant. The suit is a protective garment worn to prevent bee stings while working with honeybees, especially during honey harvesting. He also extended an invitation to the minister to come and harvest honey on his farm.

*Mr Joel Mamabolo, Director: Animal Production at the Department of Agriculture explaining the Acts administered by the Department of Agriculture that relate to bee farming.*

# BEES ARE NOT OPTIONAL

*Beeswax is a natural byproduct of honey production by bees, making it a sustainable and renewable resource.*

*Honey that hasn't been extracted yet refers to honey that is still contained within the honeycomb cells of the beehive, and hasn't been separated from the wax and comb.*

Mercia Smith

Bees are not just contributors to the agricultural system, they are foundational to its very survival. "Bees are not optional," Mr John Steenhuisen, Minister of Agriculture said at BEECON 2025. From fruit and vegetables to oilseeds and nuts, bees are a silent, industrious force at the heart of the food system. "That is why I really appreciate the sweet invitation to come and speak at this conference," Mr Steenhuisen said.

The department recognises the potential of beekeeping to transform rural economies, support sustainable agriculture and drive ecological stewardship. With the right investment, regulations and coordination the apiculture sector can become one of the most dynamic and inclusive segments of the agricultural economy. "That is why the department commissioned the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) to research bees," he said. The project specifically focuses on the surveillance of American foulbrood in honeybee colonies in the country. The aim is to protect beekeeping and pollination services to ensure healthy beekeeping practices.

The minister highlighted three key dimensions of why beekeeping must now be seen as a strategic national priority, not just a niche practice for hobbyists or specialist farmers. Fewer than 2 000 registered beekeepers service a growing demand for pollination services.

The first dimension is the role of beekeeping in food security. Food security is about diversity, nutrition, affordability and resilience, not just calories.

The second dimension is the intrinsic relationship between beekeeping and biodiversity conservation. Through their daily movements between plants, bees support seed dispersal, soil regeneration and the reproduction of wild flora.

The third dimension is that the government will continue to intensify the implementation and enforcement of the regulatory framework to manage bee diseases and the Capensis challenge. The Cape honeybee (*Apis mellifera capensis*) poses a unique problem in South Africa due to its ability to become a social parasite of other honeybee subspecies, specifically the African honeybee. Conservation programmes must now fully integrate pollinator protection.

"Investing in beekeeping is also about producing futures, not just honey. A future where food is abundant, ecosystems are healthy and livelihoods are sustainable," Mr Steenhuisen concluded.