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SOUTH AFRICA CRACKS DOWN ON FAKE HONEY: WHY REAL HONEY MATTERS, AND HOW YOU CAN SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

p8



TOP NEWS

p4 MINISTER STEENHUISEN OPENS A HUGE SOLAR PLANT AT MOOIGEZICHT ESTATES

p5 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO MOVE WITH SPEED TO VACCINATE CATTLE FOR FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

p6 THE NEW PLANT IMPROVEMENT ACT OPENS DOORS FOR PLANT BREEDERS AND HEMP CULTIVATION

p7 HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH TO TRANSFORM AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

p9 KAONAFATSO YA DIKGOMO FARMER AWARENESS DAY

p10 DEPUTY MINISTER HANDS OVER AGROCHEMICALS TO CONTROL SPREAD OF BANANA BUNCHY TOP VIRUS



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FROM THE MINISTER'S DESK



planning, adapting, trading and crisis management moves at a dizzying pace. Time waits for no one, and in this sector, we are dedicated to making every single second count.

This has been a year defined by resilience, recovery and profound personal sacrifice.

We pause to offer our deepest, most heartfelt thank you to every farmer, farm worker, industry partner and stakeholder. We know you traded precious, irreplaceable moments – empty chairs at the family table and missed events – to ensure our country remained food secure. Your commitment is the bedrock of our country's stability, allowing our voice to echo on the world stage. We are a proud, resilient sector, and we refuse to yield to any challenge.

We entered 2025 speaking of recovery. While the year presented mixed fortunes, the positive outcomes far outweigh the challenges, and the recovery is undeniable. We are now committed to doubling down on our hard work to ensure our sector prospers and we secure more new markets for our world-class produce.

Relief and record success

The year's success story began with the weather. When the late La Niña rains finally arrived and lingered, a collective sigh of relief echoed across our fields. These generous, extended showers delivered a victory of epic proportions, proving that proactive management can tame environmental uncertainty.

Despite early anxieties about planting delays, the 2024/25 summer grain and oilseed harvest was stunning. Total production surged to an astonishing 20,2 million tons, a 30% increase from the year before. This included the second-largest maize crop ever recorded (16,44 million tons) and a record-breaking soya bean harvest of 2,771 million tons.

TIME WAITS FOR NO ONE: A YEAR IN REVIEW

As the final weeks of 2025 speed by, it feels like only yesterday we were welcoming in the new year.

If you stand still for a moment and listen closely, you can hear the heartbeat of South African agriculture. It is not a slow, steady rhythm, but a fast, relentless pulse.

This feeling is the truth that shatters old myths that agriculture is slow, passive and old-fashioned.

We know the reality. While we patiently wait for the sun and rain to mature our crops and nurture our herds, the engine of

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Cont from pg 2.

The horticulture and wine sector also demonstrated its adaptability. Sugar production is up by 7%, and our wine industry staged a strong recovery with an 11% uptick. Citrus growers shipped a phenomenal 203,4 million cartons, representing a massive 22% export increase, while the table grape harvest increased by 4%.

This abundance translates directly into economic strength. Our agricultural exports for the first three quarters of 2025 grew by a robust 10% to US\$11,7 billion. This is not just an impressive figure; it is a clear statement of South Africa's global competitive edge, supported by marked improvements in port logistics this year.

Foot and mouth disease – Our shared national mission

Nevertheless, we cannot speak of 2025 without acknowledging the immense emotional and financial strain faced by our cattle sector. The persistent spread of Foot and mouth disease (FMD) across several of our provinces – with KwaZulu-Natal remaining a critical area – was a severe challenge, leading to market closures and extreme hardship.

In the face of this adversity, the sector has responded with an unprecedented, nation-building initiative. This crisis has urged us to implement a historic policy shift—the commitment to vaccinate our entire national cattle herd.

This is a mammoth undertaking! With an estimated national herd of 14 million animals, achieving our target of 90% coverage in commercial and communal areas will require approximately 28 million vaccine doses over time, with an estimated initial cost of R2,8 billion just for the vaccines.

This commitment is about much more than cattle health; it is a strategic move to secure our future, aiming for World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) recognition of FMD-freedom with vaccination.

We are already seeing significant vaccine traction—over 930

000 animals in the hardest-hit provinces have been vaccinated in recent months. Furthermore, we are aggressively accelerating plans to establish a local, mid-scale vaccine production facility, ensuring we reduce our dependence on imports and build a secure, long-term biosecurity foundation.

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) is on track with a mid-scale manufacturing facility. While fundraising for the main factory is ongoing, the ARC aims to produce 20 000 multivalent vaccine doses by Q4 of 2025/26 and 150 000 to 200 000 doses by Q1/Q2 of 2026/2027.

Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) has secured an agreement with the Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI) for continuous dedicated imports of a million doses per month, which will enable South Africa to complete vaccination in crucial areas of KZN, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and parts of Gauteng.

The diagnostic capacity at the Onderstepoort veterinary laboratory will be increased through the employment of veterinary technologists. The task team is also exploring the use of other laboratories to alleviate pressure from this laboratory. Diagnostic kits and vaccines will be imported as and when required.

Looking ahead

As the year comes to a close, our optimism is firmly rooted. The Agbiz/IDC Agribusiness Confidence Index is up by 67 points, a sign that the entire sector believes in our ability to thrive. With favourable La Niña rains expected to continue, and our historic vaccination programme underway, 2026 is poised to be a year of significant growth.

We will ensure FMD freedom with vaccination. This is a national mission, and we need every citizen, every stakeholder and every farmer to walk beside us.

Your dedication has carried us through the hardest of times, and together we will ensure our sector's prosperity, demonstrating that the future of South African agriculture is bright, resilient and unstoppable.



Minister John Steenhuisen at the 2025 Toyota Young Farmer of the Year Awards.



Minister John Steenhuisen, AFASA President, Jabulani Mthembu, and Director-General of the Department of Agriculture Mooketsa Ramasodi at the AFASA Conference.



MINISTER STEENHUISEN OPENS A HUGE SOLAR PLANT AT MOOIGEZICHT ESTATES



The system includes 1 152 solar panels, 100 lithium-ion batteries and 10 km of medium-voltage line connecting 19 points.

Samuel Kgatla

Mooigezicht Estates in De Doorns reached a milestone with the official opening of a solar power plant by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, on 25 November 2025. The solar power investment in the Hex River Valley demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable energy, reducing operational costs, and enhancing resilience against energy and water challenges in the agricultural sector. It signals a powerful commitment to renewable energy within the nation's vital agricultural sector.

The R30 million energy project was designed and implemented by 2Zero50, a renewable energy company which designs and installs custom solar and green energy solutions. It took six months starting from April and finishing in September this year. Mooigezicht is a table grape farm run by the Rossouw family. The farm produces and exports roughly 2 million 4,5 kg cartons of seedless grapes annually. Mooigezicht employs over 360 permanent workers, a number that grows to more than 2 000 during the peak harvest season. Mooigezicht is a clear example of what is possible when a farm not only invests in solar but rethinks its entire energy strategy.

The farm previously operated with 20 Eskom points, each adding to the enormous, fixed costs of their combined electricity bill. With the new system, that number has been reduced to just one – a 315 kVA point – resulting in significant financial savings from reduced fixed costs alone. Mooigezicht's theoretical peak load was calculated at 950 kW, with an expected real peak of 670 kW, meaning a large portion of that demand must now be met independently by alternative sources. The new system includes 1 152 solar panels, 100 lithium-ion batteries and 10 km of medium-voltage line connecting 19 points, effectively

transforming Mooigezicht into a private microgrid. The result is a resilient, future-focused power system capable of balancing solar, grid, battery and generator inputs across the entire farm.

Mooigezicht Estates has over 340 houses, two schools, a library and a clinic. The 300-hectare table grape farm is managed by Mr Francois Rossouw. Rossouw, who grew up on the farm, won the National Young Farmer of the Year during the 2025 Toyota SA/AgriSA Award ceremony and the 2025 Western Cape Young Farmer Award.

He mentioned that going solar was not just a business move; it was about becoming more self-reliant, reducing their carbon footprint, and easing pressure on the national grid. "This is going to lower electricity costs for families living in the houses, which is a big win for everyone. I want to thank everyone who made it possible for us to finalise the energy project. I believe that the business's true strength lies with its people," he said.

Minister Steenhuisen said he was excited about the official opening of the solar plant in the area. "I want to thank the management of Mooigezicht Estates for their progressive approach, noting that it is one of the first farms to adopt solar energy on such a comprehensive scale. This transition to renewable energy not only reduces the estate's carbon footprint, but also significantly cuts production costs. Understanding the investment behind such a project is key and the long-term savings often justify the initial solar panel manufacturing plant cost breakdown," he said.

The minister together with other stakeholders also donated some gifts to the children of Mooigezicht Estates as part of the special festive gathering with the community.



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO MOVE WITH SPEED TO VACCINATE CATTLE FOR FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Samuel Kgatla



Minister John Steenhuisen announced the department's fight back strategy about FMD

Livestock farmers received a massive boost in the fight against Foot and mouth disease (FMD) in South Africa. This comes after an important announcement made by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, to vaccinate the entire national herd. The minister made this announcement during the African Farmers Association of South Africa (AFASA) Conference held at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) in Roodeplaats on 26 November 2025. This is part of the department's plans in response to the outbreak of FMD. This is a notable change for South Africa's red meat industry and the farmers who feed the nation.

The vaccination drive will start with the hardest-hit provinces like KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Free State, Mpumalanga and North West, which will submit their livestock numbers as well as their number of quarantined farms. The programme will see over 2 million vaccines procured by February 2026, with dairy farms getting priority. Furthermore, the department is planning to establish a new mid-scale vaccine production facility which should make an additional 1,5 million vaccines available. The plan relies on consistent, high-quality vaccine supply, as well as effective law enforcement to prevent the uncontrolled movement of animals.

The minister said the department has resolved to implement a comprehensive strategy to vaccinate the entire national herd. "Despite the vaccination of over 930 000 animals over the past three months, uncontrolled animal movement has been undermining containment efforts. We must be honest with the public and with our farming sector. This is a battle we are currently not winning. The Red Meat Industry Services body (RMIS) has been tracking the outbreak and providing constant updates about the efforts to contain and treat the disease. The RMIS and other industry players were instrumental in tackling the issue by tracking spread, aiding containment and supplying vaccines," said the minister.

Chief economist of the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (AGBIZ), Wandile Sihlobo, added that the vaccination plan would be a massive undertaking but was "courageous" given the threat of the diseases. "We have a national herd of around 7,2 million head of cattle. Still, this decision is courageous, as it ensures that South Africa protects its cattle herd and can continue its focus on red meat exports," he said.

DoA is working closely with Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP), the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and international partners including China and Argentina to ensure vaccines reach farms quickly, safely and at large scale. The department plans to apply to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) for recognition as "foot-and-mouth-free with vaccination" once the rollout reaches sufficient scale, potentially opening lucrative export markets.



THE NEW PLANT IMPROVEMENT ACT OPENS DOORS FOR PLANT BREEDERS AND HEMP CULTIVATION



Once registered, hemp varieties will become available to farmers

Rony Moremi

The Department of Agriculture announced the commencement of the Plant Improvement Act, 2018 (Act No. 11 of 2018) and its regulations. The proclamation of the new Act was signed by President Cyril Ramaphosa following the approval of the regulations by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen. The proclamation of this Act and its regulations were both published in the *Government Gazette* No. 53707 on 21 November 2025.

This new Plant Improvement Act replaces the 1976 legislation, the Plant Improvement Act, 1976 (Act No. 53 of 1976). This modernised framework aims to strengthen the production and sale of high-quality, true-to-type seeds and propagating material, ensuring greater productivity and sustainability in South African agriculture.

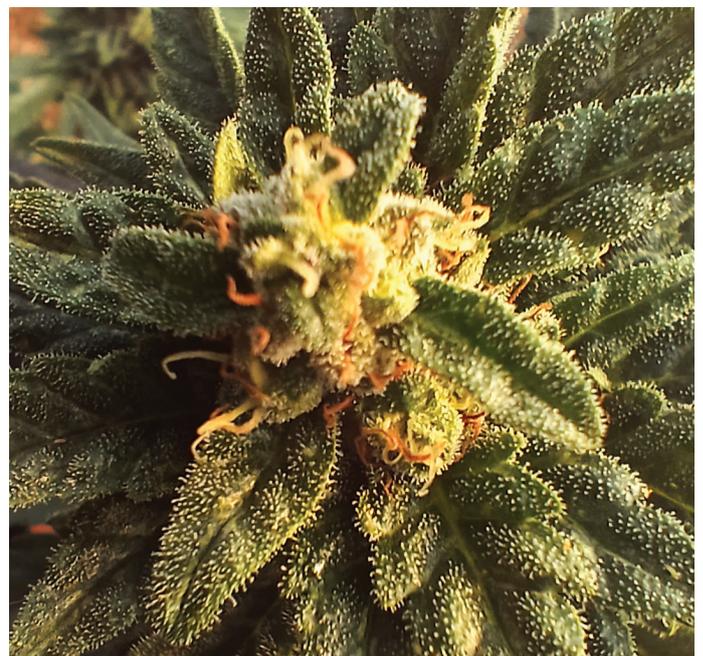
A major highlight is the inclusion of *Cannabis sativa* L. (industrial hemp) cultivation. The Act revises the THC threshold from 0,2% to 2%, aligning with international norms and unlocking opportunities in industrial hemp markets such as textiles, biocomposites and wellness products. It also makes provision for the publication of a National Varietal List Journal and the hearing of objections lodged with the Registrar in respect of an application for National Listing of a plant variety.

The Act introduces key systems for the registration of plant-related businesses and premises, quality standards for seeds and propagating material, National Listing of Plant Varieties and certification schemes and import and export controls to enhance biosecurity.

For plant breeders, these provisions mean improved market access, transparent listing processes and technical support through an advisory committee, fostering innovation and credibility in the sector.

The department emphasises that this legislation will boost food security, support innovation, and position South Africa as a competitive player in global plant breeding.

For more details on the Act, please visit the departmental website at www.nda.gov.za.



The ten-fold increase in the threshold of THC in hemp from 0,2 to 2% will enable crop breeders the opportunity to breed a wider range of locally adapted hemp varieties



HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH TO TRANSFORM AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

Mercia Smith



Deputy Minister Nokuzola Capa, Prof. Jesmael Mataga and MEC Mase Manopole planting a citrus tree at the South Campus as a symbol of growth.

“Urban-based youth perceive agriculture as disconnected from contemporary youth culture, outdated and low-status, offering limited financial opportunities and is often associated with the elderly and the poor in rural areas. That is why South African youth are drawn to the prospects of well-paying jobs in towns and cities, rather than pursuing a career in farming,” Ms Nokuzola Capa, Deputy Minister for Agriculture said.

A dialogue with young farmers was held in Kimberley, Northern Cape, on 28 November at Sol Plaatje University's South Campus. After the successful hosting of the G20 Meeting of Chief Scientists (MACS) and the ministerial events for the Agricultural Working Group (AWG) and Food Security Task Force in May and September 2025, the Department of Agriculture recognised the importance of providing provinces that did not host these events with an opportunity to engage with and understand the outcomes and implications of these G20 discussions.

“The dialogue was aimed at identifying policy gaps and challenges that hinder and/or promote meaningful participation of youth in the mainstream agricultural

economy while highlighting opportunities and possible steps that could be taken to improve the situation for the better,” Ms Mase Manopole, MEC for Northern Cape Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform said.

MEC Manopole highlighted the importance of community engagement as a fundamental component of agricultural transformation. Initiatives such as school gardens, community food hubs and home food production programmes have been designed to strengthen food security at the local level, while offering pathways into commercial agriculture. “Community-centric agricultural efforts will encourage the cultivation of indigenous crops, fostering resilience and reinforcing the cultural farming practices that have nourished communities for generations,” she said.

During the dialogue, young farmers voiced the numerous challenges they face, stemming from restricted access to crucial resources, healthcare, education, training, employment and economic opportunities. This ongoing exclusion has severe consequences, including high rates of youth unemployment (which can reach over 66% in some regions), social isolation, mental health challenges and reduced social cohesion. The barriers are often structural, stemming from factors such as geographical isolation, limited digital literacy and misalignment between education systems and labour-market demands.

According to Deputy Minister Capa, youth-driven innovation is vital for maintaining the competitiveness of food supply chains and adapting to changing circumstances. In light of these modern challenges, it is essential to create opportunities throughout the value chain, encompassing farmers, industries, wholesalers, retailers, food services and service providers such as storage companies, transport firms, banks and other institutions. Therefore, the educational potential of young people in these specialised fields must be harnessed to foster innovative solutions that address evolving societal issues.



Tlhoks Vegis, a family crop farming business based in Kuruman in the Northern Cape, grows and processes vegetables. Founded by Leithogonolo Leserwane (in the middle), the company started in 2016 as an informal business, operating from home as a backyard garden. Babelaz sauce and Sambok spice are some of their products.



SOUTH AFRICA CRACKS DOWN ON FAKE HONEY: WHY REAL HONEY MATTERS, AND HOW YOU CAN SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



The honey seized at QONCE Eastern Cape



Department of Agriculture officials with the South African Police Services during a briefing parade

Matsepo Malatswane

South Africa is turning up the heat on fake honey, and for good reason. While many products on supermarket shelves may look golden and delicious, not everything sweet is real honey.

According to the Agricultural Product Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990), honey sold in the country must be 100% pure, correctly labelled, honestly packaged, and compliant with strict national food standards. This law exists to protect consumers from fraudulent products and to ensure that hardworking beekeepers are not pushed out of the market by cheap imitations disguised as honey. Fake honey often made from sugar syrups and additives misleads buyers, manipulates prices, and undermines the integrity of the entire agricultural sector.

To safeguard consumers and restore honesty in the honey market, the Directorate: Inspection Services (D: IS) of the National Department of Agriculture is leading a major joint compliance and enforcement operation. From 2 to 4 December 2025, the operation targeted the sale and distribution of fake honey and syrup falsely presented as honey. Inspections were conducted in key Eastern Cape areas, including the East London CBD, Mdantsane and King William's Town (Qonce). Working alongside the South African Police Service and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, inspectors checked shelves, tested suspicious products, scrutinised labels, and confiscated anything that violates national standards. The message to offenders is clear: fake honey has no place on South African markets, and the department is taking decisive action to remove it.

These enforcement efforts are crucial as fake honey harms both the public and the honey industry. Consumers pay for a product they are not getting, while genuine beekeepers who invest time, skill and care to produce authentic honey are unfairly undercut by illegal, cheap imitations. By stepping up inspections and increasing public awareness, the department aims not only to clean up the market, but also to support local producers and strengthen confidence in agricultural products.

Consumers also play a vital role in protecting themselves. While laboratory testing is the formal way to verify honey authenticity, simple everyday checks can help shoppers make informed choices. Reading the label carefully is a good start and any wording such as "honey blend" or "honey-based syrup" should be a red flag. Real honey is thick and slow-moving, unlike fake honey, which tends to flow quickly like water. Even the classic spoon test can be useful: real honey clings to the spoon, while fake honey drips rapidly. Price is another indicator; if the product is unusually cheap, it is likely not genuine honey. Buying from trusted brands or from local beekeepers remains one of the safest ways to ensure authenticity.

The department urges South Africans to report any suspected fake honey in shops or informal markets. With coordinated efforts between Government, law enforcement, honest producers and vigilant consumers, South Africa can protect its markets and ensure that the honey on our shelves is the real, pure, golden product it is meant to be. Together, we can stop fake honey, support local beekeepers, and keep our food supply safe.



KAONAFATSO YA DIKGOMO FARMER AWARENESS DAY



Demonstrations of goat marking



Ms Lilly Qwabe from Directorate: Animal Health, doing her presentation on animal identification

Innocent Mhlanga

The Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development joined hands in implementing farmers and demonstration awareness campaigns on a range of livestock research-based farming methods.

The purpose of the Kaonafatso ya Dikgomo Farmers' Awareness Day is to inform, demonstrate and disseminate research-based farming information and methods on livestock health, bull selection, DNA sampling and Foot and mouth disease (FMD) awareness to equip small-scale farmers in becoming market-driven livestock entrepreneurs.

Since KwaZulu-Natal is at the peak of the FMD infection rate, it is deemed necessary to train farmers on awareness on all signs of the disease together with restrictions that have been put in place for transportation of animals.

Farmers came from all the villages to attend these information days where a lot of knowledge were shared; demonstrations on cattle castrations, artificial inseminations, dehorning and DNA sampling were done practically for the farmers to understand the best methods they can use.

Ms Lilly Qwabe from the Directorate: Veterinary Public Health said, "Farmers, especially small-scale farmers, urgently need help and she is glad that the leadership of the department is providing them with such opportunity to interact with people physically. I am very happy to be mingling with farmers; they need information, and they need it urgently so that it can help them and make their lives easier. I always struggle to capture their information on our database for their cattle certificates. In most cases they send us incomplete and incorrect information, and by providing that incorrect information, it makes a one-day event become a month or two long, so me being here will make our farmers' lives easier."

These series of awareness sessions and demonstrations took place in the uMkhanyakude and uMzinyathi districts, respectively. A lot of information was disseminated to the farmers to empower them with practical knowledge and facilitate their transition into market-oriented livestock enterprises.



Animal identification demonstration



Some demonstration about animal branding and identifications



DEPUTY MINISTER HANDS OVER AGROCHEMICALS TO CONTROL SPREAD OF BANANA BUNCHY TOP VIRUS



Deputy Minister Capa together with MEC for Agriculture in KZN, KaMadlopha-Mthethwa



KwaNyuswa Agricultural farmer Siphephelo Ngubane together with Department of Agriculture officials

Innocent Mhlanga

The Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV) is a plant pathogenic virus of the family Nanoviridae which is known to infect banana plants. This disease, referred to as Banana Bunchy Top Disease (BBTD), gets its name from the bunchy appearance of infected plants. Infected plants cannot recover, so unless plants are destroyed, they will serve as a source for viral particles that can be transmitted from plants to plants by the banana aphid, *Pentalonia nigronervosa*.

On 12 November 2025, the banana growers in the Ugu District, KZN, gave a collective sigh of relief when Deputy Minister Capa, the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture, Mr Mooketsa Ramasodi, the mayor of Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality, Cllr Zodwa Mzindle, Inkosi Xolo from KwaXolo Traditional Authority and other departmental senior managers took time and descended to the province to hand over agrochemicals to farmers affected by the Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV), which has destroyed banana plantations in commercial, smallholder and subsistence operations.

The deputy minister convened an inspection and stakeholders consultative meeting on 26 September 2025 and made commitments to intervene. In less than two months, Ms Capa returned to Ugu District banana growers armed with tons of agrochemicals to eradicate the banana aphid, the vector responsible for the spread of BBTV, which is a devastation to banana growers in the region.

The deputy minister handed over 3 000 litres of chemicals to subsistence and smallholder farmers from Ray Nkonyeni, Umdoni and Umzumbe local municipalities, in addition to 3 000 litres of agrochemicals that were delivered and handed over to commercial farmers in October 2025.

In her keynote address, Deputy Minister Capa emphasised the collaboration effort between Government, academia, industry and the community in general.

“This collaborative effort will ensure that effective strategies to control diseases such as BBTV are implemented early, and we would like to emphasise that the distribution of chemicals is the only part of the solution; however, the department, working together with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will continue to work together to strengthen awareness and education in the community at large,” said the deputy minister.

She also pointed out that both commercial and smallholder growers must continue to work together for the advancement of the banana industry as it is a cornerstone of economic development in the Ugu District. She also committed that the department and the provincial counterparts will organise a visit by growers to other African states to learn from them and share ideas on how to manage the BBTV and other related plant diseases.



Trees affected by Banana Bunchy Top Virus

