



agriculture

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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SOUTH AFRICAN AGRICULTURE RECORDS STRONGEST EXPORT PERFORMANCE SINCE COVID-19 AS MARKET DIVERSIFICATION PAYS OFF

South Africa's agricultural sector has once again demonstrated resilience and global competitiveness, delivering a record export performance in the fourth quarter of 2025 despite significant headwinds in the global trading environment.

South Africa's total exports reached a record R581,5 billion by the end of the fourth quarter of 2025 and agriculture contributed R268,7 billion, the highest level since the COVID-19 pandemic. The agriculture exports grew year-on-year by an average of 9% when compared to the fourth quarter of 2024, which was R243,7 billion.

This performance was achieved despite a strengthening Rand, tighter regulatory measures in some markets, and the impact of the United States' 30% "Liberation Day" tariffs.

Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen said the figures reflect "A sector that is not only resilient, but increasingly strategic in its approach to global markets. While agricultural exports to the United States declined sharply by 36% in the fourth quarter of 2025 as a direct result of higher tariffs, our diversification strategy has clearly borne fruit. Strong growth to BRIC+ countries, the United Kingdom, the European Union and SADC more than offset those losses," he said.

Exports are still skewed towards Africa with about 53%, Asia and Middle East at about 17%, the EU at about 16% and 14% to the rest of the world including North America and South America. The exports growth areas in 2025 were the UK at 21%, BRIC+ countries at 31%, the EU at 9% and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) at 8%.

The agricultural trade surplus rose to R24,6 billion in the fourth quarter, underscoring the sector's positive contribution to South Africa's balance of payments when compared to the surplus of about R20 billion recorded during 2024.

This achievement stems from government support to export-oriented horticulture which has demanded the opening of new markets, rapid deployment of precision-agriculture tools, and expanded value-chain finance rather than pure acreage growth. Our sector has also embraced modernisation which is continuing to bear fruits. Adoption of new farming methods has led to commercial farms raising yield per hectare by embracing satellite-guided fertilisation, drone-based pest scouting, and soil-moisture sensors embedded in variable-rate irrigation rigs, reducing water utilisation by 18% to 25%.

The department's policy support in terms of the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP) has unlocked R1,2 billion from the public and private financial institutions for irrigation upgrades and packhouse expansion, resulting in a 15% reduction in post-harvest losses since 2024. Significant agricultural exports in 2025 highlighted the sector's dual role as a generator of foreign exchange and a cornerstone of domestic food security, and about 950 000 jobs. Primary agriculture contributed about 2,8% of the GDP, but its value chain's contribution was about 14% of the R7,34 trillion of the GDP during 2024.

The strongest-performing export categories during 2025 included table grapes, maize, berries, wine, citrus, apples and pears; sugar, nuts, fruit juices, wool, apricots, cherries and peaches. Notably, fruits and nuts alone accounted for 26% of total agricultural exports in this quarter.

Minister Steenhuisen said that this momentum provides a platform for further market expansion.

“Good progress has recently been made in expanding international market access for South African agricultural products. This includes newly secured market access for South African stone fruit into China, as well as the first shipment of South African table grapes to the Philippines, which is currently en route. These developments will go a long way in further increasing the value of the sector's contribution to South Africa's exports.”

“We also gained market access for table grapes to the Republic of Korea during January 2026 and our first shipment will head there for the first time in the 2026/2027 season, and we are also speeding up the conclusion of market access negotiations with the Philippines for apples and pears and their experts will be undertaking verification to South Africa during the last week of March 2026. I will be visiting the Philippines during July 2026 to ensure the finalisation and publication of the export protocol.”

The minister said that opening new markets is central to insulating the sector from geopolitical risk and trade volatility.

“Agriculture cannot be overexposed to any single trading partner. Our strategy is clear: broaden market access, deepen relationships across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and secure new protocols that unlock value for producers.”

The fourth-quarter performance also coincides with encouraging domestic employment figures. According to Statistics South Africa’s latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey, agriculture added 30 000 jobs in the final quarter of 2025, bringing total sector employment to approximately 950 000 people. The sector recorded a robust 3,3% quarterly growth rate which places it amongst the strongest job creators in the economy.

“This is not accidental,” Minister Steenhuisen said. “It reflects expanding farming operations, growing export volumes, and renewed confidence across the agricultural value chain. At a time when other sectors are shedding jobs, agriculture is creating them.” The minister acknowledged that challenges remain, particularly ongoing port inefficiencies and external tariff pressures. However, he noted that improvements in network industries and logistics reform are beginning to show tangible benefits for exporters.

“Our farmers are competing in some of the most demanding markets in the world. The record performance in the fourth quarter of 2025 confirms that South African agriculture remains globally competitive, resilient and forward-looking,” Minister Steenhuisen concluded.

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