

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE JOHN STEENHUISEN GALA DINNER REMARKS
AT THE SOUTH AFRICA-ITALY AGRIBUSINESS FORUM**

SOMERSET WEST, WESTERN CAPE

09 JUNE 2026

His Excellency Francesco Lollobrigida, Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry of the Italian Republic,

Ambassadors,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening.

Welcome to Idiom Wine Estate and to the Cape Winelands.

After a full day of speeches, discussions and business engagements, it is a pleasure to welcome you to this beautiful setting overlooking one of South Africa's most productive agricultural regions.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Minister Lollobrigida and the Italian delegation for so generously hosting this evening's dinner. It is a fitting reflection of the warmth and friendship that have characterised this Forum from the outset.

As South Africans, we have a deep appreciation for good food, and I suspect that is something we have in common with our Italian friends. I am certainly looking forward to enjoying some authentic Italian cuisine this evening and experiencing another important part of Italy's rich agricultural and culinary heritage.

I suspect that by this stage of the day, everyone is far happier to be sitting down to dinner than listening to another speech, so I will keep my comments brief.

Let me begin by thanking our Italian guests for making the journey to South Africa. We are delighted to have you here, not only in Cape Town, but also in one of the country's most iconic agricultural regions.

I leave today's sessions with a real sense of excitement. Today's discussions have reinforced my belief that the opportunities between South Africa and Italy are far

greater than many of us may have appreciated at the outset of this Forum. What stood out to me was not simply the opportunities that were identified, but the enthusiasm with which people engaged with one another.

Throughout the day, I saw business leaders exchanging ideas, researchers making new connections, and people from two different countries discovering how much they have in common.

That is exactly what we hoped this Forum would achieve.

The real value of gatherings like this is not found in conference programmes or communiqués. It is found in the conversations between people. It is found in the exchange of ideas, in the relationships that begin to form, and in the trust that develops when people sit across a table from one another and explore what they can build together.

Agriculture, after all, is ultimately a people business.

It may involve technology, machinery, science and innovation, but at its heart it is still about people. It is about farmers who rise before the sun. It is about families who have worked the same land for generations. It is about entrepreneurs willing to take risks, researchers searching for solutions, and businesses looking for new opportunities.

That is something South Africans and Italians understand particularly well.

Our two countries may be separated by geography, but we share a deep appreciation for food, agriculture, family, tradition and the importance of preserving what we inherit while continually innovating for the future.

This evening provides us with something that is often in short supply in busy conference programmes: time.

Time to continue conversations that began earlier today. Time to get to know one another beyond our titles and organisations. And time to reflect on the opportunities that have emerged from our discussions.

One of the things that has impressed me most throughout the day is how quickly people have moved beyond formal introductions and into substantive conversations about what can actually be achieved together. That is always a good sign.

Successful partnerships are rarely built through official agreements alone. They are built through trust, through shared experiences and through the confidence that comes from understanding one another's perspectives and ambitions.

That is why gatherings such as this matter. They create the space for relationships to develop, and it is often those relationships that ultimately determine whether opportunities become investments, whether ideas become projects, and whether discussions translate into lasting outcomes.

The setting this evening reminds us that agriculture is about far more than production alone. It is about communities, culture, heritage and the people whose livelihoods depend on the success of the sector. Across both South Africa and Italy, agriculture has helped shape landscapes, sustain rural economies and create traditions that are passed from one generation to the next.

Those shared values provide a strong foundation for the partnership we are building.

Most importantly, I hope that the conversations begun today continue this evening and into tomorrow. Some of the strongest partnerships are not formed in meeting rooms. They are formed over shared meals, shared experiences and the simple act of getting to know one another.

That is why evenings like this matter.

As we conclude the first day of this Forum, I am more convinced than ever that we have made the right decision in creating this platform. The relationships being formed here have the potential to outlast any individual meeting or event. My hope is that years from now we will look back on this inaugural gathering as the beginning of a long and successful partnership between our two countries.

For tonight, however, I encourage you to relax, enjoy the food, enjoy the company, and enjoy the hospitality of the Cape Winelands.

May this be the first of many South Africa-Italy Agribusiness Forums and the beginning of friendships and partnerships that endure for many years to come.

Thank you and enjoy the evening.