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AGRICULTURE  
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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**19 February 2026**

### **SOUTH AFRICA CELEBRATES HISTORIC MILESTONE AS FIRST STONE FRUIT SHIPMENT DEPARTS FOR CHINA**

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, accompanied by His Excellency Ambassador Wu Peng of the People's Republic of China, visited the Freshness First Packhouse in Franschhoek on Wednesday, 18 February 2026 from where the first shipment of stone fruit was prepared for export to China.

The visit focused on the dispatch of approximately 20,000 cartons of premium plums, primarily consisting of the African Delight and Ruby Star varieties. This shipment marks the official commencement of the stone fruit trade protocol, a move set to transform the local deciduous fruit industry.

Speaking at the event, Minister Steenhuisen highlighted that the opening of this Chinese market is no longer just an aspiration but a fundamental necessity for South Africa's economic growth.

"Today, the Chinese market is a strategic necessity, not merely an opportunity for South Africa's agricultural resilience.

"This is a milestone that Ambassador Peng and I have worked toward together, and today I am happy that we have realised it," he said.

Minister Steenhuisen noted that this export comes at a time, following the signing of a bilateral trade agreement that grants South African produce 0% tariff access into the Chinese market. This agreement significantly enhances the competitiveness of local farmers on the global stage.

## **Diversification and economic growth**

With China importing approximately \$200 billion in agricultural products annually, South Africa currently holds a modest 0,4% market share. South Africa aims to drastically increase this figure, targeting a doubling of the current R400 million export value over the next four years.

“South Africa does have the capacity to provide the quality and quantity of fruit that consumers in China will enjoy,” Minister Steenhuisen said. “The implementation of this stone fruit protocol will offset the immediate impact of tariffs imposed by other trading partners, particularly on plums. I am confident that our volumes into the Chinese market are going to increase tremendously.”

## **Cherries and blueberries**

The stone fruit shipment is the first phase of a broader expansion strategy. Minister Steenhuisen confirmed that the government is in the final stages of concluding the protocol for cherries, and later in the year, the protocol for blueberries.

He concluded by thanking the industry leaders, growers, and packhouse staff for their tireless efforts in meeting the rigorous phytosanitary standards required for this breakthrough.

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