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***Agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen speech at the TMR Conference,  
Johannesburg 09 June  
2025***

***"The South African Road to Food Security for the Dairy and Red Meat Industry  
and Product Exports"***

**Chairperson, industry leaders, producers, exporters, government colleagues,  
honoured guests,**

Thank you for the invitation to open this important gathering. Today, we focus on two of the cornerstones of South Africa's agri-food economy - our dairy and red meat industries - and the road ahead to achieving not only national food security, but a globally competitive export sector that delivers value, jobs, and resilience.

We are at a pivotal moment. Our food systems are under pressure - from disease, from drought, from geopolitical shocks, and from a changing climate. But we are also presented with enormous opportunity. South African livestock, beef and dairy products are already world-class. The challenge is not quality - it is scale, sustainability, and access.

In this address, I want to reflect on five strategic pillars that I believe must guide us on our road to food security and export growth in red meat and dairy. These pillars are:

1. Biosecurity and disease resilience
2. Structural transformation and inclusion
3. Regulatory efficiency and trade enablement
4. Climate adaptation and environmental stewardship

## 5. Public-private partnerships and institutional coordination

### 1. Biosecurity and Disease Resilience

Let me start with the elephant in the room: Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD).

Since the outbreaks of 2019, FMD has dealt a severe blow to our red meat industry. It has closed doors to critical markets. It disrupted supply chains. And it sent shockwaves through producer confidence.

We have learned some hard lessons. We cannot export our way to prosperity without credible, science-based, and trusted disease control systems.

Our department is working closely with industry through joint command structures to improve surveillance and rapid response. But we know this is not enough.

We need:

- A sustainable, nationally coordinated FMD vaccination programme that meets the standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH);
- Upgraded veterinary infrastructure.
- And strong biosecurity protocols, not only at our borders but at farm level, transport corridors, and auction sites.

Traceability is also non-negotiable. South Africa must adopt a system that meets international traceability requirements - digital, decentralised, and inclusive. I acknowledge the work of Red Meat Industry Services (RMIS) in building a platform, but we must close the digital divide and ensure adoption by all producers, including those in communal areas.

We are prioritising the finalisation of the National Traceability Framework, and we will continue to support farmer compliance through targeted technical support.

With regards to the current FMD outbreak, we have ordered vaccines to cover the KZN area, while assessment, as well forward and backward tracing of the outbreak in Gauteng is ongoing.

These plans are not only about responding to outbreaks, but it's also about building permanent infrastructure to manage future risks.

## **2. Structural Transformation and Inclusion**

Food security in South Africa is not just about food availability - it's about who participates in the system.

Too many smallholder and communal livestock farmers remain excluded from formal value chains. Many do not have access to cold chains, feedlots, or export-standard abattoirs. They face long transport distances and limited access to finance or veterinary support.

As government, we are expanding farmer support services. But we must be honest: the pace of transformation in the red meat and dairy value chains is too slow.

That's why we are committed to:

- Fast-tracking the implementation of commodity-based development models that cluster smallholders around anchor processors and buyers;
- Investing in rural infrastructure - feedlots, dip tanks, milk collection centres, and rangeland improvement;
- And ensuring that black and youth-owned livestock enterprises are included in export opportunities - not as a gesture, but as a business case.

We must reframe communal livestock not just as a store of wealth, but as an economic engine that, if formalised and supported, can lift entire districts out of poverty.

### **3. Regulatory Efficiency and Trade Enablement**

Let me turn to trade.

South Africa has some of the most desirable red meat and dairy products in the world. Yet we continue to be hampered by regulatory delays, inconsistent enforcement, and non-tariff barriers.

Export certification processes are often too slow. And engagements on market access can be fragmented or under-resourced.

We are working to fix this. My Department is:

- Strengthening the Export Certification Coordination Committee to streamline approval processes.
- Prioritising trade negotiations that open new markets for beef, lamb, offal, and dairy powders.
- And accelerating work to meet the standards of key regions - including the Gulf States, the European Union, and East Asia.

We are also enhancing collaboration with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to align veterinary diplomacy with trade strategy.

Let me be clear: export competitiveness begins at home - with compliance, consistency, and credible state systems. But it must end with an unrelenting pursuit of new markets and opportunities.

### **4. Climate Adaptation and Environmental Stewardship**

We cannot speak about food security without speaking about climate.

Our livestock sectors are being directly affected by climate variability:

- Recurring droughts are shrinking grazing lands;

- Water scarcity is constraining dairy productivity;
- And heat stress is affecting reproduction and animal health.

We must respond decisively.

That is why we are investing in:

- Climate-smart livestock systems, including drought-resilient fodder species, rotational grazing models, and precision feeding.
- Soil rehabilitation and rangeland restoration, particularly in overgrazed communal lands.
- And expanding farmer access to climate information, early warning systems, and training.

As we move to a lower-carbon future, South Africa must ensure that any sustainability standards or carbon border mechanisms do not disadvantage our emerging producers.

That is why we are calling for a global approach that is just, inclusive, and locally responsive.

## **5. Public-Private Partnerships and Coordination**

Finally, none of this will be achieved if we continue to work in silos.

Our success depends on deepening public-private collaboration - not only on funding, but on policy alignment, research, and implementation.

That is why we are committed to:

- Strengthening forums like the Red Meat and Dairy Master Plans.
- Partnering with processors and buyers to invest in offtake agreements that provide smallholders with secure markets.
- And working with industry to deliver joint extension services, disease control, and farmer training.

We are also working to modernise the veterinary profession, digitise our services, and build a more responsive, efficient, and transparent department.

## **In Closing**

Chairperson, friends,

The road to food security and export growth for red meat and dairy is not a short one. It will require strategic investment, inclusive partnerships, and the courage to tackle entrenched inefficiencies.

But the destination is clear: a South Africa where:

- Every farmer, large or small, has a pathway to the market.
- Our red meat and dairy products are trusted and traded across the world.
- And our livestock sector is a driver of nutrition, resilience, and rural development.

Let us walk that road together - with urgency, with clarity, and with shared purpose.

I thank you.