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Media Statement

Minister John Steenhuisen on accelerating food systems transition for South Africa's food sovereignty

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, reaffirmed South Africa's commitment to food sovereignty as a pillar of national resilience and development at the UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake (UNFSS+4). This three-day conference held at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, brings together heads of state, ministers, scientists, producers, indigenous leaders, youth and civil society from around the world.

Minister Steenhuisen outlined a series of strategic initiatives designed to strengthen local food production and empower communities to define their own food policies. "We are promoting localised food production, with a clear focus on leveraging indigenous crops and livestock, which have both nutritional and climate resilience advantages."

"Current government programmes are mapping these crops nationwide and investing in research to identify underutilised plants and their agro-processing potential to develop products that will facilitate the upscaling and uptake of these foods for nutrition security," he said. Minister Steenhuisen added that community seed banks are also being developed, ensuring reliable access to quality seeds and supporting agricultural self-sufficiency.

Breeding for resilience is the buzzword in promoting livestock, with a focus on indigenous livestock for genetic material. Strengthening biosecurity with the development of modern diagnostic tools that will aid tracking and tracing outbreaks, and research and development of vaccines to support prevention programmes, are prioritised.

Minister Steenhuisen reaffirmed that supporting smallholder farmers remains a top priority of Government, highlighting that the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) is providing targeted financial, training and infrastructure support to enhance productivity and sustainability. “With food inflation on the rise, initiatives like Ilima/Letsema’s “One Household, One Garden” model are designed to help households mitigate rising food costs, especially for vulnerable populations,” Minister Steenhuisen indicated.

South Africa is also advancing sustainable and regenerative production systems. “We are actively encouraging our farmers to embrace regenerative agriculture, agroecology and conservation practices. These approaches are designed to restore land, improve biodiversity, and future-proof local food systems in the face of climate volatility,” he said.

Minister Steenhuisen emphasised that food safety and quality assurance are non-negotiable priorities. “The South African Good Agricultural Practices (SA GAP) programme is helping farmers – especially smallholders – adopt responsible, market-friendly production methods that meet both domestic and international standards,” he added.

Reflecting on global cooperation, Minister Steenhuisen pointed out that South Africa is engaging with partners such as the G20 Food Security Task Force and the FAO to address food price inflation and its impact on low-income households. The aim is to develop policy “baskets” that support effective interventions, both at home and across the African continent. Key elements include smallholder farmer support, sustainable agriculture aligned with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and country-led planning—all in support of the African Agenda 2063.

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