



MINISTER
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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Speech by Minister John Steenhuisen

Agri Western Cape Congress | 2025

Theme: "Krag van Verbintenis"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Esteemed members of Agri Western Cape,

Leaders of organised agriculture,

Producers, partners, and friends,

Good morning and thank you for the warm welcome. It is a privilege to be with you here today, on the land, among the people, and within a community that gives life to our economy, sustains our tables, and anchors our rural towns.

The theme of your congress this year: “Krag van Verbintenis”, could not be more timely or more urgent. In a time of uncertainty, geopolitical strain, climate risk, and economic headwinds, the real power we hold is our ability to unite around a shared mission—to secure South Africa’s agricultural future.

Today, I want to speak to you about the value of partnership, the work we are doing to address urgent challenges, and the vision I hold, for our farmers, for our sector, and for the country we serve.

1. The role and value of organised agriculture

Let me begin by affirming this: Organised agriculture is not a stakeholder of government. It is a strategic partner in national development.

From Agri SA and your nine provincial affiliates, to commodity groups, co-operatives, producer forums, and value chain alliances, you are the connective tissue between farmers and the policy environment they operate in.

You know what works on the ground. You know what holds farmers back. You understand the cost of indecision and the price of bad policy.

That is why, since taking office, I have prioritised a culture of collaboration over confrontation. In the Western Cape, that tradition runs deep. Agri Western Cape has demonstrated how real-time feedback, practical problem-solving, and a no-nonsense approach can generate results, whether in mobilising drought recovery during the 2015–2017 crisis, supporting thousands of farmworkers through the Prestige Agri Awards, or driving export readiness through digital compliance training that reached over 2,600 users last year. You have been instrumental in strengthening traceability systems, coordinating effective fire responses, and advocating for inclusive resilience programmes that support both commercial and smallholder producers. Your model proves what is possible when government and organised agriculture work together to deliver.

From the outset of my tenure, I have prioritised open channels of engagement with Agri SA and its affiliated provincial structures. There have been ongoing technical-level consultations and periodic bilateral meetings to ensure alignment between policy objectives and sectoral realities. Going forward, I am exploring more formalised mechanisms, beyond the existing Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan, to ensure that strategic decisions include input from industry leadership. Because let us be honest—when government pretends to know it all, we all lose. But when we combine our mandates with your expertise, we can move mountains. That is the real power of verbintenis.

2. Strategic focus areas and challenges

Now, let me turn to what we are working on.

There is no sugar-coating it, South African agriculture is at a crossroads. However, we are not standing still. We are confronting our challenges head-on.

First, biosecurity.

Foot and mouth disease has devastated confidence in our livestock sector. However, we are fighting back with a fundamentally new approach to disease management, one that is science-based, coordinated, and future-fit. We are building a national regionalisation framework to allow trade to continue safely from unaffected zones. We are stabilising vaccine availability through imports and future stockpiling, while

calling on the private sector to co-invest in a nationally-managed vaccine bank. We are integrating spatial planning with veterinary controls, supporting the construction of abattoirs and feedlots in protection zones, to enable movement control and compliance. This is the foundation of our new biosecurity model, and it is essential to restoring market trust and protecting rural livelihoods.

Second, infrastructure and market access.

You cannot farm if your produce cannot move. You cannot export if your ports, permits, and paperwork fail you. That is why we have made agri-logistics, market access, and border harmonisation national priorities, through close work with Transnet, SARS, and our trading partners. New bilateral protocols for table grapes, beef, citrus, and avocados are all in motion.

Third, farmer support

The days of blanket programmes are over. We are moving toward commodity-based, outcome-focused, and partnership-driven support. Whether it is through infrastructure grants, land preparation, or mentorship programmes, our support must help farmers compete, not just survive. The Western Cape's commodity support model is already being looked at as a national benchmark.

Fourth, inclusive growth.

This cannot be a sector that grows while leaving many behind. My commitment is clear: transformation must be practical, scalable, and rooted in partnerships, not ideology. The best way to transform agriculture is to make sure that every farmer, large or small, can get to market, access finance, and build a viable enterprise.

3. Vision for agriculture and message to Western Cape producers

So, what is my vision?

Simply put: A modern, competitive, inclusive agricultural sector that feeds our people, exports to the world, and anchors rural South Africa in prosperity.

Agriculture is not a relic of the past, it is a driver of the future. It is a place where green growth, digital innovation, and global trade converge. Whether it is exporting citrus to China, wagyu beef to the Gulf, or wine to Berlin, our producers are not just farmers. They are exporters, scientists, entrepreneurs, and nation builders.

And the Western Cape stands tall in this story.

You are the country's most productive agricultural province. You contribute more than 50% of our agricultural exports. Your wine, fruit, vegetables, and grain are symbols of South African excellence across the world. But beyond that, you are innovators, on traceability, water management, agri-tourism, and farmer support. To the producers here today, I want to say: You are not alone.

Your grit, your resilience, and your long hours are seen. And this government, my department, stands ready to walk with you. Not as a passive regulator, but as an active partner in growth.

This year, as South Africa holds the G20 Presidency, we have put agriculture front and centre. We are using that platform to push for fairer trade rules, faster recognition of our quality systems, and stronger investment in African agri-food systems. Our message to the world is simple: South Africa can feed itself, and contribute to global food security.

However, none of that is possible without you—the farmer in Ceres; the packhouse manager in Worcester; the wine grower in Robertson; and the logistics company in Paarl. Krag van verbintenis means nothing if we do not walk the path together.

Closing

In closing, let me return to where I started.

The future of agriculture will not be decided in government offices or boardrooms alone. It will be decided in the relationships we build, the trust we foster, and the commitments we honour.

It is said that 'n tou trek sterker wanneer almal dieselfde kant toe trek. That is true for rope, and it is true for us.

So let us pull in the same direction. Let us commit, to our country, to our farmers, and to our shared future.

Thank you. Baie dankie. I look forward to continuing this journey with you.

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