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Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,
Farmers, partners, financiers and friends in agriculture,

It's a pleasure to stand before you today, not only as Minister of Agriculture, but as someone who believes deeply in the potential of African agriculture to drive development, create jobs and grow our economy. In this room are the people who make that possible every day. Whether you work the land, transport the harvest, finance the growth, or buy the produce, we are, all of us, part of the same ecosystem.

Today, I want to talk not only about what we are doing, but what we must do, together. Because the global playing field is shifting fast. If we do not move with strategy and urgency, we risk falling further behind. But if we are bold, deliberate and united, we can put African agriculture at the centre of global solutions, from food security to trade, from climate action to economic recovery.

Let me begin where global influence meets national interest.

1. Leveraging the G20 Platform to Champion African Agriculture

This year is momentous as we officially opened the G20 Agriculture Working Group under South Africa's 2025 Presidency on 23 April. South Africa assumes the chair of this working group at a moment where the pressures on global food systems are undeniable. As such, this is a moment of both urgency and opportunity.

Urgency, because food insecurity, climate volatility and systemic exclusion continue to

threaten the stability of global food systems.

Opportunity, because never has the world had such scientific insight, technological capacity and a shared policy platform to do something about it. This is a defining time for agriculture, not only in South Africa, but across our continent and the world.

We are dealing with rising input costs, unpredictable climate shocks and constrained fiscal spaces – all of which are being felt first and most severely by small-scale producers, women farmers and the rural poor.

Yet within these challenges, there is also real opportunity to change the terms of inclusion in agricultural markets; to build resilience not only into our systems, but into our institutions and to connect innovation with impact at the scale and speed that this moment demands.

But we also come into this role with confidence – rooted in our partnerships with many of you, and in our commitment to four core priorities that form the backbone of the Working Group's agenda, namely:

1. **Inclusive market participation:** ensuring that smallholders, women, youth and marginalised communities are no longer on the periphery of food systems, but firmly at the centre.
2. **Empowerment of youth and women:** not as beneficiaries of development, but as drivers of agricultural transformation and innovation.
3. **Technology and innovation transfer:** particularly to bridge the gap between those who invent and those who need access to those inventions; and
4. **Climate resilience:** building systems that can feed the world without destroying the ecosystems that support them.

These are not just South Africa's priorities; they reflect a shared global concern. And they speak directly to the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the urgent need to make agriculture part of the solution to today's complex challenges.

There is no overstating the role agriculture plays in our world.

It feeds families, fuels economies and stabilises communities. But to unlock its full potential, we must move beyond good intentions. Beyond rhetoric. And toward the kind of practical collaboration that enables lasting change.

But we also need something else: fairer global financing.

We live and trade in a global free market. Our farmers aren't standing on the sidelines – they are producing, exporting and competing in the same value chains as producers from the Global North. And yet, they are expected to do so within a financial architecture that was never designed with them in mind.

It is simply not acceptable that African farmers remain locked out of the capital markets they need to expand, invest and succeed in. That is why, under South Africa's chairship of the G20 Agriculture Working Group, we are putting global financial reform firmly on the table. Our aim is to unlock concessional finance that supports real agricultural transformation across the continent – not as a favour, but as a matter of fairness. This is not aid. It is common sense. It is good economics.

If we want African farmers to scale up, adopt new technology, diversify crops, and build processing capacity, then we need capital that fits our context. Capital that does not come with assumptions baked in from boardrooms in London or Washington. Our realities are different – weather volatility, unresolved tenure issues and fragmented local markets – and we need financing instruments that reflect that. That is why we are pushing for blended finance tools, sovereign guarantees, and targeted investment vehicles that can de-risk agricultural lending, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises.

The G20 gives us a platform to make this case directly. And we are doing just that: arguing that investing in African agriculture is not a risk, it is a necessity. It underpins food security, rural employment, climate resilience and the long-term stability of our economies.

But we also need development finance institutions to shift how they operate. Not just in how much they lend, but in how and to whom they lend. Because for too long, African producers have been told to compete in free markets while others quietly benefit from subsidised finance, export credit and generous risk cover.

That imbalance must be addressed. And as chair of the G20 Agriculture Working Group, we are determined to drive that conversation forward, with clarity, with urgency and with Africa's voice at the head of the table.

2. Strengthening and Extending AGOA for Inclusive Trade Growth

We also have a strategic window to reshape another tool, namely, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

AGOA, if renewed and modernised, can drive a new era of trade between Africa and the United States. But it must evolve. Too much of our trade today is still based on raw commodities, goods that are exported with little value addition, little job creation and little transformation.

We are pushing for an AGOA that supports value-added exports – African products; processed and packaged on the continent, creating jobs from farm to shelf.

But let me be clear: AGOA must also be made more inclusive. Smallholder farmers and SMEs are the beating heart of African agriculture. They must not be shut out by overly

complex rules of origin or bureaucratic red tape. The future of trade lies not only in scale, but in participation.

However, while AGOA hangs in the balance, we are accelerating our efforts to diversify our export destinations. South Africa is the second-largest exporter of citrus globally and the US is a key market; however, key growth opportunities exist in Asia, particularly in China and India, where demand for citrus products is rising due to increasing consumer trends. Strengthening trade agreements with the European Union and expanding market access in the Middle East would also help offset potential losses from the US. Additionally, improving cold storage logistics and supply chain efficiencies will make South African citrus more competitive in these alternative markets. However, South Africa faces significant infrastructure challenges, including unreliable rail transport, inefficient port operations and aging cold storage facilities. The country's freight rail system, crucial for transporting citrus from inland farms to ports, has suffered from operational inefficiencies and frequent disruptions, leading to costly delays. Investment in modernising rail logistics and upgrading port facilities, particularly in Durban and Cape Town, will be crucial to ensuring that citrus exports reach global markets swiftly and in top condition.

3. Reducing Non-Tariff Barriers and Harmonising Standards

Now let me turn to something that every exporter in this room knows too well: non-tariff barriers.

You can have the best harvest, the best packaging, the most competitive price, but if your product is blocked at the border because of inconsistent or discriminatory sanitary rules, the deal is dead before it begins.

South African agriculture is facing this challenge right now. Our citrus industry, one of our most strategic export sectors, is grappling with restrictions related to citrus black spot, a fungal disease that poses no real risk to European consumers but is used as a pretext to keep our fruit out of their markets. This is not science. This is protectionism dressed up as biosecurity.

South Africa is also seeking access for its premium mango varieties, primarily produced in Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Mangoes are increasingly popular in Japan, where demand is driven by both fresh consumption and use in high-end confectionery. Japan's import market for mangoes is currently dominated by countries such as Mexico, Peru and the Philippines. For South Africa to secure a foothold, ensuring compliance with Japan's strict phytosanitary protocols, especially relating to fruit fly management and cold treatment, is still an obstacle.

And this is not limited to citrus and mangoes. Across the board, from table grapes to grains,

our producers face barriers that are not about safety, but strategy. These barriers are particularly crippling for new exporters trying to enter high-value markets. They discourage innovation, distort competition, and rob African producers of hard-won opportunity.

That is why we are calling for greater alignment of international SPS standards, and for regional harmonisation under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

But let me speak frankly: the AfCFTA, as promising as it is, is not yet delivering for agriculture. We still face delays, policy inconsistencies and cross-border inefficiencies that hold back trade.

South African maize exporters attempting to send consignments to Kenya or Tanzania face inconsistent customs documentation requirements, duplicated inspections and delays at transit borders such as through Zimbabwe, Zambia, or Malawi. Furthermore, limited infrastructure and poor border-post efficiency hinder the timely movement of perishable goods, impacting trade competitiveness.

This situation illustrates a broader issue: AfCFTA's implementation gap. While the agreement is in force on paper, the regulatory, procedural and infrastructural inconsistencies between Member States still act as de facto barriers, especially for time-sensitive agricultural exports. We need to fix this. We need to streamline procedures, harmonise policies and, most importantly, implement what we have agreed on paper.

Regional integration is not a slogan, it is a tool. And we must sharpen it.

I have also engaged with Minister Tau and Minister Lamola for the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Task Team between the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation so that we can provide a coordinated approach towards expanding agricultural trade, removing market access barriers and boosting exports in key international markets.

4. Navigating Global Food Security and Sustainability Policies

Globally, agriculture is being shaped by new narratives: food system sustainability, emissions targets, green subsidies and carbon markets.

But here is the problem: too often, Africa is left out of the conversation, or worse, penalised by policies designed without our input.

European carbon border taxes, for example, make African exports less competitive – even though our farmers contribute far less to global emissions. Similarly, green subsidy regimes in the Global North continue to distort global prices, hurting African producers.

We are calling for African voices to be included in shaping global food policies, not as an afterthought, but as equal partners. But Africa must be prepared to negotiate collectively in

trade and environmental negotiations where food exports are at risk. If EU policies like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism affect African agri-exports, collective diplomatic and economic pressure, perhaps even reciprocal mechanisms, can be used to push for fairer terms. South Africa's seat at the G20 also offers a direct route to shaping the agricultural and food security priorities of the world's largest economies and should be used deliberately to push for African food system reform, inclusive financing and fair trade.

From our side, the Department of Agriculture is helping farmers adopt more climate-resilient practices—from conservation agriculture, to soil restoration and water-smart irrigation systems. Through our Farmer Support and Development programmes, we are equipping producers to adapt to the new climate reality, not just with advice, but with tools.

But adaptation is not enough. We need mitigation. We need innovation. And we need global partners who are willing to invest in African climate-smart agriculture, not just write reports on it.

5. Enhancing Investment Through Predictable and Enabling Policy Environments

Let me end with an issue that cuts across all others: investment.

Africa's agriculture sector is full of potential. But as every financier in this room knows: potential doesn't unlock funding. Predictability does.

We must create environments where investors feel confident, where they understand the rules, where policies are clear, and where commitments are honoured.

That means coherence between national and provincial governments. It means progress on land reform with clear rights and secure tenure. It means building trust between the public and private sectors.

We are working on this. We are aligning our national policy frameworks, cutting red tape, and reconfiguring public-private partnerships to drive infrastructure delivery and market access. But we also need you, our partners in finance, logistics and retail, to work with us in identifying bottlenecks and building solutions.

Conclusion

Friends, we do not lack ideas. We do not lack passion. What we must now bring is focus, coordination and political will.

The road ahead will be challenging. But I believe in this sector. I believe in its people. And I believe in Africa's right not just to feed itself, but to feed the world on its own terms.

Let us commit, here and now, to implementation. Not just talking. Not just planning. Doing.

Thank you.