agriculture
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Media Statement **30 June 2025**

Minister Steenhuisen opens the 58th conference of the South African Society for Agricultural Extension and the first Agricultural Extension Week

Today, the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen reaffirmed the government's dedication to agricultural extension services, highlighting their pivotal role in fostering inclusive rural development, ensuring food security, and facilitating vital knowledge transfer at the centenary celebration of the establishment of formal agricultural extension services in the country.

This historic centenary coincides with the inaugural South African Agricultural Extension Week and the Fifty-eighth Conference of the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE). The theme of this year's conference is: "Leveraging innovation and technology to enhance Extension and Advisory Services for sustainable agriculture, improved livelihoods and food security".

In his opening remarks, Minister Steenhuisen said: "This occasion marks not only a centenary since the establishment of formal extension services in South Africa in 1925, but also a renewed commitment to ensuring that agricultural extension remains at the heart of inclusive rural development, food security, and knowledge transfer in our country.
"Agriculture is the bedrock of South Africa's economy and society. It ensures food security, supports rural livelihoods, and drives employment. However, it is the work of our extension practitioners that truly unlocks the potential of our producers, particularly smallholders who depend on support, advice, and innovation."

Minister Steenhuisen emphasised that extension practitioners provide practical, tailored advice that helps producers improve productivity, adopt sustainable practices, manage risks, and access markets. Their role underpins the entire agricultural value chain, which contributes about 12% to the national gross domestic product (GDP).

Notably, the agricultural sector grew by 15,8% in the first quarter of 2025—a growth driven in no small part by the work done by extension practitioners.

SUPPORT

“To better assist producers, particularly smallholders, the Department of Agriculture is implementing the Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion (SHEP) approach, in partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). This "market-oriented agriculture" model is already bearing fruit, with 18 extension officers trained in Japan last year and another 20 scheduled to depart this October,” Minister Steenhuisen announced.

The department will also prioritise assistance to women, youth, and persons with disabilities in the agricultural sector as these groups often face the greatest barriers.

“Let us make agriculture a career of choice for young people by showing them its breadth—from agritech and agro-processing to entrepreneurship and policy”, added the minister.

To support this, the department will employ 260 assistant agricultural practitioners this year, strengthening its capacity to deliver extension services.

The department’s Farmer Field School (FFS) initiative, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is also being expanded from its current base in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Northern Cape.

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