



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Private Bag X250, Pretoria, 0001; 20 Steve Biko Street, Pretoria, 0001
Tel: 012 319 6000; E-mail: queries@nda.gov.za; Web: www.nda.gov.za

MEDIA STATEMENT

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MINISTER STEENHUISEN CALLS FOR URGENT RESOLUTION TO SECURE SUGAR MILLS AND PROTECT LIVELIHOODS

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, has expressed serious concerns about the escalating crisis facing the sugar industry following the liquidation of Tongaat Hulett, which has placed significant uncertainty over the operation of key sugar mills ahead of the April crushing season.

The department has been engaging with industry stakeholders and has been informed that, unless the current funding impasse is urgently resolved, growers will be unable to deliver cane and processing will come to a halt. The consequences of such an outcome would be severe, affecting approximately 15 500 delivering growers and between 35 000 and 40 000 people whose livelihoods depend directly on the supply chain linked to the mills.

“This is not a theoretical risk, it is an immediate economic threat to rural communities,” Minister Steenhuisen said. “If the mills do not open, farmers cannot harvest, workers cannot earn an income, and entire local economies will stall. The longer uncertainty persists, the greater the damage becomes.”

“Government’s concern is simple: the crop cannot wait. Agricultural production works on biological timelines, not legal or financial ones. An intervention that unlocks funding and restores operational certainty is urgently required to protect both production and jobs.”

The Department of Agriculture is engaging with the relevant departments and financing stakeholders to support a practical solution that preserves production capacity and avoids irreversible losses in the sector.

Minister Steenhuisen emphasised that the sugar industry remains a strategic contributor to rural economies and food value chains, and that allowing production to collapse would have far-reaching economic and social consequences well beyond the farm gate.

“Our objective is not to intervene in commercial negotiations, but to ensure that a viable path forward exists so that growers can deliver cane, mills can operate, and workers can earn an income. The immediate priority must be keeping the season alive.”

The Ministry will continue to monitor developments closely and stands ready to facilitate engagement aimed at securing continuity in production.

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Ms Joylene van Wyk

Director: Media Liaison Ministry of Agriculture

Email: joylenev@nda.gov.za or medialiaison@nda.agric.za

Mobile: 083 292 7399 or 063 298 5661

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