

Keynote Address

Mr John Steenhuisen (MP)

Ministerial Meeting of the G20 Agriculture Working Group

Somerset West, Western Cape, 18 September 2025

Fellow Ministers,

Honourable Member of the Executive Council for Agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism in the Western Cape,

Director-General of the Department of Agriculture,

Head of Department of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture,

Representatives of the G20 countries,

Distinguished Delegates

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Somerset West in the Western Cape. This province is one of South Africa's agricultural heartlands, a place where wine, fruit, and grain fields stretch across fertile valleys, and where generations of farmers have built not only livelihoods, but a culture deeply rooted in the soil. It is, therefore, fitting that we gather here today, in the presence of this landscape, to consider how agriculture can drive resilience, opportunity, and sustainability across the globe.

Over the past year, our officials and delegations have worked assiduously to prepare the outcomes that we, as ministers, are gathered here to adopt. Their work has translated diverse perspectives into a shared framework of priorities that reflect the needs of farmers and consumers across the world.

From the beginning, South Africa set out to ensure that agriculture would take its rightful place at the centre of the G20 agenda. Agriculture is not a sector that can be placed on the margins; it is the foundation of food security, livelihoods, and stability. Our presidency has been anchored on four key priorities: making markets more

inclusive, empowering youth and women, fostering innovation and technology transfer, and building climate resilience.

We have placed inclusive market participation at the centre of our work. Across our continent, smallholders, youth, and women form the backbone of production, yet too often they remain excluded from markets. Here in South Africa, programmes like the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme and blended finance schemes have enabled young farmers in provinces such as Limpopo and Mpumalanga to access land, credit, and equipment, connecting them to local and export markets. The outcomes we consider today reflect this spirit, committing us to policies and partnerships that make markets more open, transparent, and fair.

We have also prioritised the empowerment of youth and women. Across Africa, women account for up to 60% of agricultural labour, yet face persistent barriers to land, finance, and technology. In South Africa, women-led cooperatives are building thriving enterprises that not only feed communities, but also create employment. Agricultural colleges like Fort Cox, Cedara, and Taung are equipping young people with the skills needed to lead farms and agribusinesses into the future. These local examples echo a broader global commitment—that empowerment is not only a matter of fairness, but a driver of innovation and resilience in our food systems.

On innovation and technology transfer, our presidency has worked closely with global partners to ensure that research and science are translated into tools that farmers can actually use. The Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists (MACS), held earlier this year in Limpopo, advanced cooperation on soil health, water efficiency, climate-smart innovation, and biosecurity research. These discussions have helped align research pipelines with practical adoption, creating new pathways to deliver drought-tolerant cultivars, precision irrigation, and digital advisory systems.

We have also underscored the role of innovation ecosystems, where public research institutions, private investors, and farmers co-create solutions. Across Africa, mobile platforms are linking smallholders to buyers, input suppliers, and real-time climate information. In South Africa, partnerships with universities and agritech companies are developing early warning systems for pests and diseases, alongside blockchain traceability tools that make our exports more competitive. The consensus outcomes

before us today reflect this momentum, affirming that innovation must be affordable, accessible, and inclusive, with smallholders as full participants, not passive recipients. Equally, we have emphasised climate resilience as the backbone of agricultural sustainability. Climate change is the single greatest threat to global agriculture, and it is farmers, particularly small-scale producers, who feel its impact most directly. Here in the Western Cape, the 2017 drought forced farmers to reimagine water management, introducing drip irrigation, groundwater recharge, and diversified cropping. Across southern Africa, intercropping, conservation agriculture, and renewable-powered cold chains are helping communities to adapt and reduce risk.

At the G20 level, we have strengthened cooperation on resilience through shared research and data platforms. The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) continues to provide vital transparency on global supply and demand, helping governments respond to price volatility before it escalates into crisis. The outcomes we are considering today reinforce the value of such tools, while also calling for new investment in climate finance, targeted towards adaptation in agriculture. For South Africa and many developing countries, this is critical: climate finance must be accessible to farmers who are already innovating on the frontlines of resilience.

Excellencies, these achievements, and outcomes matter. For farmers, they mean greater access to resources, markets, and technologies. For consumers, they mean safer food, more stable prices, and better nutrition. For governments, they mean stronger rural economies, reduced vulnerabilities, and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Looking forward, the outcomes of this meeting will inform the broader G20 agenda. Tomorrow, the Food Security Task Force will take forward complementary work on resilience and affordability, and in November, the Leaders' Summit in Johannesburg will elevate our shared priorities into the communiqué. In this way, what we agree on here will not end today, but will continue to shape global agriculture and food governance into the future.

Colleagues, our task is to send a clear and united message—that agriculture is central to prosperity, resilience, and sustainability, and that we as ministers are committed to ensuring that no community, no farmer, and no nation is left behind.

Let us seize this moment to show the world that agriculture can be a source not only of food, but of hope, dignity, and opportunity for all.

I thank you.