

BUDGET VOTE SPEECH FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

8 July 2025

Honourable John Steenhuisen, MP

Minister of Agriculture

National Assembly, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa

2025/26 financial year

Chairperson, Honourable Members of the Portfolio Committee, Deputy Minister Capa, Esteemed Colleagues, Stakeholders, and Fellow South Africans,

It is a privilege to stand before you today to present the 2025/26 Budget Vote for the Department of Agriculture (DoA).

This is more than a procedural responsibility, it is a defining moment for agriculture in our country. The restructuring of the department, now solely focused on agriculture following its separation from Land Reform and Rural Development, marks the beginning of a more intentional, more focused, and more responsive era in public agricultural policy.

Our mission is as urgent as it is ambitious: To build a food system that is inclusive, competitive, sustainable—and above all, one that leaves no South African behind.

1. A SECTOR AT A CROSSROADS

South African agriculture stands at a crossroads.

On one side, we see the extraordinary potential of this sector to generate jobs, contribute to the gross domestic product (GDP) growth, strengthen exports, and revitalise rural economies. On the other side, we confront persistent risks: Climate shocks, high input costs, biosecurity failures, land degradation, weak infrastructure, and uneven access to markets and finance.

There is also a human reality behind the figures—of smallholder farmers locked out of opportunity, of families facing food insecurity, of veterinary professionals overburdened and under-resourced, and of a nation that too often reacts to crisis rather than prepares for it.

This budget is designed to change that trajectory.

It is grounded in the following seven strategic priorities:

1. Partnerships for growth.
2. A modern and progressive legislative environment.
3. Improving market access.

4. Providing effective farmer support.
5. Strengthening biosecurity and disaster preparedness.
6. Advocacy for a growing sector.
7. Improving food and nutrition security.

These are not catchphrases. They are a call to action and a roadmap for transformation.

2. BUDGET OVERVIEW

For the 2025/26 financial year, the department has been allocated a budget aligned to four core programmes:

- Programme 1: Administration
- Programme 2: Agricultural Production, Biosecurity and Natural Resources Management
- Programme 3: Food Security and Support
- Programme 4: Economic Development, Trade and Marketing

Each programme will be executed with a focus on impact, value-for-money, and intergovernmental coordination.

Let me now detail our key interventions.

3. PROGRAMME 1: ADMINISTRATION

Chairperson, we cannot talk about delivery until we have built a capable and ethical State. We are finalising a new macrostructure and streamlining key systems, aiming to increase our digital integration from 18% to 30% by 2030. This includes revamping procurement oversight, reducing audit findings, and ensuring that every manager is held accountable for performance outcomes.

A department that promotes food security must itself be secure—against waste, inefficiency, and mismanagement. That is our first responsibility.

4. PROGRAMME 2: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, BIOSECURITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Chairperson, the greatest unseen threat to our sector today is not only climate, it is biosecurity failure.

The 2023 bird flu outbreak taught us that. It was not just a health incident, it was a systemic shock. Egg prices skyrocketed, small producers folded, and consumer confidence plummeted. Today, we also face a Foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak, and growing concerns about swine flu and other livestock diseases.

Let me be clear—biosecurity is not a veterinary issue—it is a national priority. It is as important to our future as electricity, water, and roads.

We are therefore:

- establishing a **Biosecurity Council**, with a whole-of-society mandate to coordinate public, private, and community responses;
- launching the **National Biosecurity Compact**—an agreement with clear roles, vaccine stock levels, outbreak protocols, and infrastructure commitments;
- deploying **50 animal health technicians** to assist with urgent vaccination roll-outs;
- prioritising **FMD containment** in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, with forward and backward tracing;
- strengthening oversight and capability at the **Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP)** to address backlogs and modernise production.

We are expanding the partnership with the University of Pretoria's National Biosecurity Hub, and enhancing surveillance, SPS capacity and graduate training. This will strengthen our ability to manage future outbreaks before they escalate.

The **Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan** will improve water use efficiency, promote drought-resistant crops, and reinforce resilience among smallholders and emerging producers. These are essential survival tools in a warming climate.

5. PROGRAMME 3: FOOD SECURITY AND SUPPORT

Chairperson, food security is not an aspirational goal, it is a daily crisis for millions.

According to the National Food and Nutrition Security Survey, only 36,5% of households are food secure. Nearly 18% experience severe food insecurity. These are not just figures. They are expressions of a child going to bed hungry, of a parent sacrificing meals, of dreams deferred.

To respond:

- We are implementing the **2024–2029 National Food and Nutrition Security Plan**, coordinated with the departments of health, education, social development, and environment;
- We are scaling up **school gardens, community food hubs**, and home food production;
- We are promoting **neglected and underutilised species (NUS)** like amaranth, African leafy vegetables, and bambara groundnuts. These offer nutrition, resilience, and cultural relevance;
- Over **66,000 farmers** have received training, and over **3,000 agricultural graduates** have been placed through our internship programmes; and
- We are integrating **all 11 agricultural colleges** into the higher education system to ensure that they become centres of excellence.

This is also a budget for the **youth**.

As I said at the Biosecurity Summit, the future of agriculture will be decided by the next generation, not only those who inherit the land, but those who study climate-smart techniques, monitor disease outbreaks, and build data systems for traceability. That is why we are opening pathways for young people into veterinary science, extension services, agri-tech, and on-farm learning.

Let us empower them to build a new kind of agriculture, one rooted in science, community, and opportunity.

6. PROGRAMME 4: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRADE AND MARKETING

Chairperson, we are proud of our export record—R258 billion in agricultural exports in 2024 alone. However, this will not continue, unless we protect and expand market access.

To that end:

- We are finalising a **revamped Market Access Strategy**;
- Negotiations are underway for new access to **Asia and the Middle East**;
- We are defending our standing under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (**AGOA**) and **European Partnership Agreement (EPA) frameworks**;
- The **track-and-trace system** will enhance livestock traceability, deter theft, and strengthen export credibility; and
- We are expanding the **Blended Finance Scheme**, with a dedicated youth, women, and climate-smart finance window.

However, here is the truth: **Government does not need to do everything.**

South Africa is fortunate to have some of the most well-organised commodity bodies in the world—from GrainSA to the South African Poultry Association (SAPA) and the Citrus Growers' Association. These institutions bring structure, research, and discipline to their sectors.

Sometimes, the most effective thing government can do is to get out of the way—create a conducive policy environment, ensure market integrity, and let the industry lead.

That is why we are shifting from control to collaboration—from top-down mandates to public-private partnerships (PPPs).

Whether it is vaccine roll-out, trade promotion, or smallholder integration, PPPs are the key to scale, efficiency, and innovation. We will expand our collaboration with retailers, financiers, processors, and producer organisations to build a competitive and inclusive value chain.

7. POLICY INTERVENTIONS FOR 2025/26

This year, we will:

- finalise amendments to the **Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act**;
- launch the **Agricultural Digital Platform** with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO);
- operationalise the **Producer Support Portal**;
- hosted the **Agricultural Extension Week**, reigniting technical support at the farmgate.

8. GOVERNANCE, OVERSIGHT, AND DELIVERY

No matter how sound our strategy, we cannot succeed if our institutions are broken.

That is why we are introducing a **Ministerial Oversight Framework** that includes the following:

- Biannual performance and audit reviews;
- Improved board accountability;
- Alignment with the Decadal Plan; and
- Consequence management for non-performance.

Entities like the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), OBP, Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB), and National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) exist to deliver—not to drift.

9. IN CONCLUSION: UNITY, URGENCY, AND A NEW AGRICULTURE

Chairperson, this budget is more than a set of figures. It is a statement of intent, a commitment to build a new kind of agriculture.

An agriculture that is youth-driven, science-based, climate-smart, and inclusive. An agriculture that understands that a farmer in Lehurutshe or Lusikisiki is just as vital to our food system as the chief executive officer (CEO) of a global agri-export firm.

We are not starting from scratch. We are building on the strengths of a sector that already works, that is already organised, and that is hungry to grow.

As President Mandela said: *“After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”*

We are ready. Let us climb together.

I hereby table the 2025/26 Budget Vote for the Department of Agriculture.

I thank you.