

## **PRESS BRIEFING SPEECH**

*Post-Budget Vote Briefing*

*Minister John Steenhuisen*

*8 July, 2025 | Cape Town*

Members of the media, thank you for joining me today.

It is a great privilege to address you following the tabling of the Department of Agriculture's 2025/26 Budget Vote. This is a pivotal moment, not only for the department but for the broader agricultural sector and all those who depend on it for sustenance, employment, and opportunity.

When we entered the Government of National Unity (GNU) just over a year ago, we did so with a clear mandate: To restore delivery, to deepen accountability, and to rebuild trust—not only with our producers and partners, but with the millions of South Africans who look to agriculture for food, jobs, and hope.

Today I can say, with humility and with conviction: We are making measurable progress.

### **1. Rebuilding institutions, restoring trust**

Our first priority has been to build a capable, ethical, and responsive department. We initiated a comprehensive restructuring process, finalised our new macro-structure, and began modernising procurement, auditing, and performance oversight systems. This work is essential. Before we can grow anything in our fields, we must first mend what is broken within our own institutions.

### **2. Restoring biosecurity and disaster preparedness**

In a world of rising animal and plant disease risks, biosecurity is no longer a technical matter, it is an economic and national imperative. Over the past year, we have:

- established the **National Biosecurity Compact** and a **Biosecurity Council**, which bring together scientists, industry experts and officials to coordinate outbreak responses;
- deployed animal health technicians to vaccinate against Foot and mouth disease in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, as well as adopted a new proactive, strategic approach;
- relaunched the **National Biosecurity Hub** in partnership with the University of Pretoria;
- commenced the country's first **avian influenza vaccination campaign**, supported by upgraded digital disease surveillance.

Our efforts are restoring confidence in our export systems and protecting farmers from catastrophic losses.

### 3. Expanding market access and defending trade

South African agriculture cannot grow without access to global markets. Over the past year:

- We facilitated new access for **avocados to China, maize to Japan and India, beef to Iran, and table grapes to the Philippines and Vietnam**;
- We managed a quick resolution to Botswana's temporary ban on South African maize and wheat, reopening the border within two weeks;
- We were part of the Presidential delegation to the **Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in China**, secured protocols for wool, dairy and meat exports, and participated in high-level delegations to **Davos, Japan, and Berlin**;
- I had formal bilateral engagements with counterparts from the G7, African Union (AU), and G20, advancing our market access and biosecurity agenda.

Thanks to these efforts, agricultural exports for the first quarter of 2025 reached **US\$3,36 billion**—a 10% increase year-on-year.

#### 4. Delivering targeted farmer support

Support must be effective and inclusive. This year:

- Over **6,000 farmers** received direct support through a R1,7 billion allocation, creating **3,000 jobs**;
- Through **Ilima/Letsema**, we supported **67,492 vulnerable households**, generating nearly **9,500 work opportunities**;
- We launched new **smallholder farmer programmes** in Jozini and beyond, focused on shifting the paradigm from “grow and sell” to “grow to sell”;
- We are fast-tracking global GAP accreditation for emerging producers and expanding access to finance through a restructured **Blended Finance Scheme**.

#### 5. Promoting a modern, fit-for-purpose regulatory framework

In May 2025, I took the decision to **revoke the designation of Leaf Services** as a grain inspection assignee, protecting consumers from unnecessary costs that would have hit bread prices hardest. This action was taken in the public interest and demonstrates our commitment to regulatory fairness.

We are also reviewing outdated legislation, including the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act, and will soon table amendments to support modern, science-based agricultural systems.

#### 6. Empowering the next generation

We have made it clear: The future of agriculture lies with the youth.

- Over **3,000 agricultural graduates** have entered internship programmes;
- We have begun integrating all 11 agricultural colleges into the higher education system, starting with Elsenburg; and
- We are investing in **climate-smart agriculture**, pollinator protection, agroecology, and digital agri-tech tools to make agriculture attractive to the next generation.

## 7. **Fighting food insecurity**

Hunger is not an abstraction. It is a daily reality.

- This year, we **launched the National Food and Nutrition Security Survey** to provide baseline data and shape targeted interventions;
- We promoted the use of **indigenous, underutilised crops** such as bambara groundnuts and amaranth; and
- We entered into a strategic partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**) to help with programme delivery and resource mobilisation.

## 8. **Leading internationally with purpose**

My attendance at key global platforms, from the **G7 Agriculture Forum** to the **G20 Working Group in Rio** and the **Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris**, has not been ceremonial.

We have advocated for:

- more inclusive financing for smallholders;
- a coordinated global response to climate shocks;
- and recognition of Africa's contribution to food systems transformation.

## **In closing: A new season for agriculture**

After one year in this new administration, our message is clear: This department is focused, it is responsive, and it is delivering.

We have a long road ahead. However, we have taken the right first steps.

This is the new season of agriculture in South Africa—rooted in inclusion, driven by data, led by partnerships, and committed to feeding our people and the world.

Thank you.

I am now happy to take your questions.