

Speech by Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen (MP)

Roodebloem Boeredag, 25 September 2025

Theme: “Die toekoms van landbou in Suid-Afrika – uitdagings en geleenthede”

Friends, colleagues, boere, dames en here,

Dit is ‘n plesier om vandag hier saam met julle te kuier en Roodebloem Boeredag te vier.

Byeenkomste soos hierdie herinner ons dat die landbou nie net oor markte en beleid gaan nie. Dit gaan ook oor mense, plaaslewe en die toekoms van ons gemeenskappe!

The theme of today, “Die toekoms van landbou in Suid-Afrika – uitdagings en geleenthede”, is spot on. Because we all know: farming in South Africa is not for the faint-hearted. *Ons almal weet dat die uitdagings soos droogtes, kragonderbrekings, stygende insetkoste en pryse nie dikwels boere se harde werk weerspieël nie.*

The Overberg plays a strategic role as the heart of South Africa’s winter grains. This region has long been a powerhouse for wheat, barley and canola, supplying our mills, brewers and markets. It is also a region known for its resilience and adaptability; however, we cannot ignore that this year, poor rains and depressed wheat prices are making life very tough. Supporting Overberg farmers with tariff automation, cultivar innovation and fairer transport cost structures are therefore essential because these policies speak directly to your realities and can make the difference between survival and decline.

Our first priority is the automation of the wheat tariff system. This is not just a technical adjustment; it is about survival. In years like this one, with drought in the Overberg and record harvests in the United States pushing global prices down, tariff automation means protection comes quickly, predictably and fairly. I have been engaging with Minister Tau and Grain SA on this matter, and together we are pushing to get this done.

A second priority is to relax the release criteria for wheat cultivars, allowing us to move carefully toward slightly lower-quality but higher-yielding varieties. This gives farmers

more options to increase productivity without compromising the industry's long-term sustainability.

At the same time, we need to invest in new and improved cultivars, especially white wheat, that can combine quality with higher yields and greater resilience. This is where science and farming meet, and it is where our long-term competitiveness will be won or lost.

Ons sal in die toekoms vir 'n wêreld waar beskermende handelsmaatreëls weer sterker word voorbereid moet wees. That means motivating for higher tariffs when necessary to protect South African producers from unfair competition. It also means implementing new transport differential calculations that better reflect current realities, so that inland producers are not disadvantaged against coastal competitors.

Colleagues, I know that right now it feels as though the challenges outweigh the opportunities. *Maar ek glo vas: as ons slim aan hierdie strategieë werk – die outomatisering van tariewe, nuwe kultivars, en beter beskerming teen globale prysskommeling – dan het die koringbedryf steeds 'n sterk toekoms in Suid-Afrika.*

Most importantly, agriculture remains the heartbeat of rural South Africa. *Elke hektaar koring, elke mielieland, elke kanola- of garsland skep werk, hoop, en 'n toekoms.* Supporting you is not only about protecting food security, but also about protecting livelihoods, families and communities.

The Overberg has always been known for its *vasbyt*. Generations of farmers here have weathered droughts, low prices and global shocks, yet time and again, you have bounced back stronger. That spirit is alive in this community today. If we stand together, as Government and farmers, we can ensure that the Overberg's fields remain the breadbasket of South Africa, and that the future of agriculture is one of opportunity, not despair.

So let us go forward together, Government, farmers, industry bodies and researchers, determined to weather this season's storms and to sow the seeds of a stronger, more competitive future.

Baie dankie vir die uitnodiging, en mag hierdie boeredag vir almal nuwe energie gee en inspirasie bied.

End.