

**Speech by Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, at the
Beekeeping Awareness Field Day, Oude Raapkraal, West Lake, Cape
Town**

10 November 2025.

Chairperson of the South African Bee Industry (SABIO), Ms Tumi Mobu,
SABIO board members,
Beekeepers,
Farmers,
Environmental stewards,
Media

Today, we gather to celebrate the honeybee because of its enormous impact on our agriculture, our economy, and our future.

Beekeeping (apiculture) in South Africa relies on two indigenous bee subspecies, namely: The Cape Honeybee (*Apis mellifera capensis*) and African Honeybee (*Apis mellifera scutellata*).

These two species are listed as animals in terms of Section 2 of the Animal Improvement Act, 1998 (Act No. 62 of 1998). This Act provides for genetic improvement in order to improve the production and performance of animals. This implies that bees are recognised as an important species in the agricultural sector for contribution to food security, income generation and economic development. Beekeeping contributes directly and indirectly to job creation in South Africa—from the beekeepers to the farmworkers involved in pollination-dependent crops.

Ladies and gentlemen, some of you will recall that during the Bee Conference held in June in Centurion, Pretoria, I made a commitment that I will meet with the bee industry before the end of this year to strengthen collaboration between the department and the sector on policy and institutional issues for food security.

The beekeeping sector is one of the priorities of the department towards supporting key fundamental outcomes, which include the following:

- Outcome 2: Increased production in the agricultural sector;
- Outcome 3: Improved food and nutrition security;
- Outcome 5: Increased market access; and
- Outcome 6: Enhanced biosecurity and effective disaster risk reduction.

You will agree that bees are essentially the farmers of the sky.

They do not use tractors or ploughs, yet their work ensures that nearly 75% of our food crops bear fruit.

In South Africa, bee pollination contributes more than R10 billion every year to agriculture. They pollinate almonds in Western Cape, citrus in Limpopo, macadamias in Mpumalanga, and sunflowers in Free State. Without them, supermarket shelves would be emptier, prices higher, and farming communities poorer.

For our smallholder farmers, pollination shortfalls translate into lower incomes and greater vulnerability.

The concept is simple—no bees, no food.

No pollination, no prosperity.

Feeding those who feed us

For bees to feed us, we must feed them.

Their food is the nectar and pollen from flowering plants—their natural energy source.

But droughts, land clearing, and monocropping have shrunk these natural food sources. When the land stops flowering, bees go hungry, colonies weaken, and honey yields decline.

Imagine if every farm, school, and roadside in South Africa became a bee garden—filled with indigenous plants, fruit trees, and wildflowers.

Those blossoms would become feeding stations for bees, restoring the balance between people, plants, and pollinators.

Planting flowers may seem small, but to a bee, it is life itself.

Pesticides—protecting without destroying

Pesticides are meant to protect crops, however, too often, they destroy pollinators.

Spraying at the wrong time —during bloom— can kill thousands of bees overnight. Beekeepers have described entire apiaries gone silent in a single morning—no buzzing, no movement, just loss.

This is why we are strengthening integrated pest management, encouraging farmers and beekeepers to communicate, spray responsibly, and use less toxic options.

Protecting crops and protecting bees must go hand in hand.

Because when bees die, farming loses its heartbeat.

From hive to table—the honey value chain

Beyond pollination, bees give us one of the most precious natural products on earth—honey.

But honey is more than sweetness; it is an economic lifeline.

South Africa produces up to 2 500 tons of honey per year, yet we consume nearly double that amount. We rely heavily on the imports of natural honey, with more than 80% of our imported honey coming from China. We also import from Zambia, India, Poland and Yemen.

Since there is such a high demand for this product, we have seen an increase of very poor quality and sometimes adulterated honey.

The Department of Agriculture's Directorate: Inspection Services will again conduct an operation in December—removing products that are labelled and sold as honey-based syrup from stores.

These operations are part of our efforts to ensure that citizens get the quality goods they intended to purchase.

By investing in our local beekeepers, honey processors, and cooperatives, we can grow this sector into a thriving value chain that supports rural jobs, exports, and food authenticity.

With relatively low land and capital requirements, beekeeping offers a viable entry point for youth, women, and rural entrepreneurs. It can be practiced alongside other forms of agriculture, creating economic multipliers within communities.

Honey, beeswax, propolis, and other hive products can generate income through local markets, agro-processing, and even exports. As such,

beekeeping is not only a tool for ecological sustainability, but also a means of economic empowerment. It fits squarely within the principles of climate smart farming and inclusive rural development.

Distinguished guests, the development of an effective and efficient beekeeping policy and strategy is crucial to safeguarding the sector from any potential threats. Bees need to be conserved. This will ensure that the South African beekeeping industry is resilient and sustainable through the value chain of honey production and pollination, which will ultimately support and contribute to food security, economic growth, and job creation.

To show my commitment for this sector, the department participated in the Forty-ninth Apimondia International Congress from 23 to 27 September 2025.

The participation of the department was important to initiate a discussion between South Africa and the European Union (EU) regarding the export of honey to the EU.

In accessing this important honey export market, the department is in the process of finalising the Residue Monitoring Plan to demonstrate compliance with the EU requirements.

To date, there are some African countries which are already exporting honey to the EU, - like Tanzania, Ethiopia and Zambia - and South Africa is more than eager to join them,.

To achieve this, there is a great deal of collaboration, government support and assistance required among us, to ensure honey production and export sustainability.

Bees and the ecosystem

Beyond economics, bees are the quiet custodians of our environment. Healthy ecosystems produce healthy food, and bees are nature's most visible and effective biodiversity champions.

Through their daily movements between plants, bees support seed dispersal, soil regeneration, and the reproduction of wild flora. They play an essential role in maintaining ecological balance.

Bees remind us that prosperity depends on balance—between growth and protection, between farming and conservation.

Closing and hive inspection

In a few minutes, we will open a hive—a living city of thousands of workers, each doing their part.

Inside lies a perfect lesson for us as a nation: Teamwork, order, and purpose. Distinguished guest, this event is hosted in a province that is reliant on bees—the Cape bee, for effective pollination to maximise crop production. Of importance, I would like to appreciate the Western Cape Bee Industry Association for developing the standard for pollination. Cognisant of the importance of bees in this province for pollination, bees should be protected from all potential threats, which include the bee disease—American foulbrood (AFB) that can cause bee decline if left unmanaged.

Ladies and gentlemen, regarding the AFB, the department has commissioned the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) to conduct research on bees: “*Survey of AFB in honeybee colonies in South Africa protecting beekeeping and pollination services*”. This research also intends for the development of a consolidated National Beekeeping Strategy for South Africa, as well as an AFB Management Strategy.

Our task is clear—to protect these pollinators, nurture our beekeepers, and grow South Africa’s honey industry into a model of sustainability and pride.

Before I conclude, I would like to point out key focus areas following the Bee Conference. The department has made progress on strategic areas to support the bee industry for sustainability and these include:

- development of a National Beekeeping/Apiculture Strategy for South Africa;
- development of AFB and other disease management and response strategy;
- Bee Forage Strategy;
- finalisation of the Residue Monitoring Plan for honey export to the EU;
- establishment of the Honey Value Chain Round-Table Forum;
- resuscitation of the biliteral engagement platform between the department and bee industry (SABIO)
- lab accreditation in South Africa for the testing of honey for disease and chemical residues.

Together, we can make sure that the hum of the honeybee continues to be the sound of life, abundance, and hope for generations to come.

Thank you.

End.