

The Farmers' Chronicles

BLOG

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A New Chapter for Agriculture: A Budget Vote That Works for Farmers

On 8 July 2025, a significant milestone was reached in Cape Town as the Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, and the Deputy Minister, Nokuzola Capa, presented Budget Vote 29 to both the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). More than a financial breakdown, this budget marks a fundamental commitment to transforming South Africa's agricultural sector into a resilient engine of inclusive growth. From seasoned commercial producers to smallholder farmers, the message is clear: agriculture is no longer treated as a side note, it is now a national priority.

R7,6 billion has been earmarked for a sector that feeds the nation. The budget for the 2025/26 financial year totals R7,6 billion, strategically allocated across four core programmes designed to address the sector's most urgent needs. These include: Administration; Agricultural Production and Biosecurity Natural Resources; Food Security and Farmer Support, and Economic Development and Trade. The allocation reflects the department's commitment to holistic sector development. R973 million is dedicated to strengthening internal systems through the Administration programme.

A substantial R2,4 billion will support agricultural production and manage biosecurity threats. The largest share, R3,2 billion, is earmarked for food security and farmer support initiatives. Lastly, R883 million has been allocated to stimulate economic development and increase market readiness. This budget is more than a ledger of expenses, it is a blueprint for transformation. It recognises agriculture as the heartbeat of rural development, a cornerstone of food security, and a vital contributor to economic growth.

Building an agile and accountable department, the Administration programme, supported by an allocation of R973 million, focuses on building a department that is more capable, accountable and responsive to the sector's demands. The funding will be used to implement a new organisational structure designed to increase operational efficiency. In addition, the department is strengthening procurement systems and working to reduce audit findings that hinder credibility.

A key aspect of this programme is the department's shift toward digital transformation, aimed at improving public service delivery.



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



A NATION
THAT WORKS FOR ALL



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This means that farmers and stakeholders can expect faster, more reliable and more transparent services. A department that functions well behind the scenes is better positioned to deliver meaningful results on the ground, results that farmers and rural communities can feel. Protecting production and biosecurity, the R2,4 billion allocated to the Agricultural Production, Biosecurity and Natural Resources programme is a clear statement that the government is taking decisive steps to protect the country's agricultural assets.

The department is establishing a new National Biosecurity Council and Compact to ensure a fast, coordinated national response to outbreaks and emerging threats. Already, 50 animal health technicians have been deployed to provinces where the risk is highest, ensuring that expertise is placed where it is most needed.

In addition, efforts to contain Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) are gaining momentum, particularly in high-risk zones. Key intervention includes the installation of a portable vaccine production system at the Agricultural Research Council's Onderstepoort Veterinary Research facility. Set for completion by March 2026, the system will have the capacity to produce 200 doses of vaccines, translating to an estimated 200,000 doses per year once fully operational. These actions are not just about preventing the spread of disease, they are about protecting consumer confidence, ensuring stable rural incomes and preserving export markets.

R3,2 billion has been allocated to the Food Security and Farmer Support programme to empower farmers and fight hunger. This programme stands as the department's strongest commitment to eradicating hunger and transforming rural livelihoods.

The National Food and Nutrition Security Plan is being implemented nationwide, with tangible initiatives such as school gardens, household food production and community-based food hubs being expanded. These initiatives will not only address malnutrition, but also empower communities to feed themselves. The department is also promoting resilient indigenous crops such as amaranth and Bambara groundnuts, which are well-suited to climate change and rich in nutritional value.

Farmer development is another priority. More than 66 000 farmers have already been trained to sharpen their technical and business skills, while 3 000 agriculture graduates have been placed at various projects to gain practical experience. To future proof the sector, eleven agricultural colleges are being transformed into Centres of Excellence. These centres aim to merge modern agricultural science with traditional knowledge, preparing the next generation of professionals to lead a dynamic and sustainable sector.

To boost trade, innovation and global competitiveness to position South African agriculture as a competitive force both locally and globally, R883 million has been set aside for the Economic Development, Trade and Marketing programme. The department is developing a new Market Access Strategy which targets rapidly growing regions such as Asia and the Middle East. Maintaining South Africa's position in international trade agreements is a top priority, particularly as the country looks to boost exports in key commodities.

As part of this strategy, a livestock track-and-trace system is being launched to meet export requirements, strengthen biosecurity, and improve traceability across the value chain.



Deputy Minister Capa

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The department is also scaling up the Blended Finance Scheme to provide targeted support for women, youth and climate-smart agricultural entrepreneurs. These efforts will drive innovation and ensure that all farmers, especially emerging ones, have access to the tools and markets needed for long-term success.

To ensure accountability and performance with such a significant investment, robust oversight mechanisms are crucial to ensure that this budget delivers real impact. To this end, the department has introduced a Ministerial Oversight Framework which includes biannual audits of programmes, regular performance reviews and strengthened accountability measures for leadership across public entities.

Institutions such as the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) the Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB) as well as the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) are all being held to higher standards. These bodies are now expected to not only deliver reports, but also to show tangible results that benefit farmers, markets and the broader economy.

Digital tools and digital transformation for modern agriculture, in keeping with the move toward innovation, is being prioritised to bridge the gap between farmers and the services they need. The Producer Support Portal is being developed as a centralised platform where farmers can access crucial government services in one place. Additionally, a national Agricultural Digital Platform, created in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), will support better data collection and decision making across the sector.

As part of efforts to bring government closer to farmers, the department is also launching Agricultural Extension Week, a national campaign aimed at revitalising technical support and on-farm mentorship. This initiative will strengthen knowledge exchange, improve farming practices, and reconnect agricultural experts with the realities faced by farmers on the ground.

Minister Steenhuisen has described this budget as a defining moment, one that reflects the work of a restructured department now solely focused on agriculture. This renewed focus is underpinned by a clear commitment to being more intentional, more responsive and more inclusive.

Deputy Minister Capa echoed this message, calling for unity and collaboration among all sectors of society. The department is working hand-in-hand with traditional leaders, private sector stakeholders, civil society, organised labour and fellow government departments to ensure that the sector delivers on its promises.

This is a new chapter for agriculture in South Africa, one defined by action, collaboration and measurable outcomes. With the right support, the nation's farmers will not only survive, but they will also thrive. Additionally, in their success lies the foundation of a food-secure, economically empowered and inclusive future for all.

-Prince Mtsweni-