

SA agriculture posts 17.4% GDP growth overcoming obstacles

South Africa's agriculture sector recorded a strong turnaround in 2025, posting 17.4% year-on-year GDP growth after two consecutive years of contraction. Bumper harvest, record exports and favourable production conditions supported the rebound despite a turbulent trading environment marked by US "Liberation Day" tariffs and animal disease outbreaks.



By [Paul Makube](#)

11 May



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The quarterly agriculture growth trend was, however, pedestrian with Q4 of 2025 decelerating 0.4% quarter-on-quarter, seasonally adjusted (sa) from 1.4% in Q3 of 2025.

Livestock sector constrained by disease outbreaks

Livestock (animal products) was the biggest growth constraint due to the outbreak of the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in cloven hoofed animals (cattle, pigs, sheep), which disrupted domestic and international trade due to movement restrictions and meat export bans, respectively.

The outbreak of the African Swine Fever (ASF) was a double whammy for pigs, causing losses producers. This was inevitable considering that animal products accounted for the biggest share of 41% of total agriculture gross producer value (GPV) at R206.87bn in 2025.

Cattle (beef and dairy), pigs, and sheep collectively accounted for 48% of the total animal product GPV in 2025. Nonetheless, the declaration of a national disaster and the adoption of a national vaccination policy will go a long way in stabilising the industry in the medium term.

Exports reach record highs

South Africa's agriculture exports defied the odds with a 10% year-on-year growth to a new record of US\$15.1bn in 2025, with Q4 of 2025 lifting 7% year-on-year to US\$3.4bn according to the Trade Map data. A combination of big volumes and higher commodity prices underpinned this good export realisation.

Seasonal production conditions for the 2025/26 agricultural year appear excellent, with a high percentage of planted area under summer crops. This is likely to deliver another good agricultural harvest, which bodes well for GDP outcomes in the medium term.

Nonetheless, the world faces another turbulent year following the outbreak of the war in the Middle East, and this poses serious risks to the agriculture sector, both from an import and export perspective.

South Africa is a net importer of important agrochemicals such as fertiliser and crude oil for fuel, and the sector might face higher input costs ahead of the winter plantings and summer crop harvesting in two months.

Higher freight costs and the potential closure of the Middle East markets due to the war may stymie export performance if the situation does not normalise in the medium term.

Looking ahead, we have another bumper crop in the fields, the potential reduction of the FMD, and a good citrus harvest season.

ABOUT PAUL MAKUBE

Paul Makube is Senior Agricultural Economist at FNB.
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