South Africa seeks bilateral U.S. trade deal following AGOA exclusion

South Africa is seeking to prevent its exclusion from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) following the U.S. administration's announcement on November 2, 2026, that eligibility would end on January 1, 2027. Rwanda is also affected, while the broader AGOA program has been extended through December 2028.

The decision affects agricultural exporters supplying citrus, berries, grapes, raisins, fruit juices, apples, pears, apricots, and nuts.

According to the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, AGOA exports accounted for approximately 10% of South Africa's exports to the U.S. in 2025 and about 1% of global exports.

Agricultural economist Wandile Sihlobo noted that the U.S. accounts for about 4% of South Africa's agricultural exports. However, citrus-growing communities in the Western Cape and Northern Cape could face pressure on employment, packhouse operations, and export margins.

Midterm elections create opportunity for negotiations

Exporters Western Cape chairman Terry Gale said Democratic victories in both chambers of Congress had created an opportunity for South Africa to seek reconsideration of its exclusion.

He called for a diplomatic and trade mission to Washington before January 1, supported by representatives of government, business, and organised labour.

Gale warned that the incoming Congress would only take office on January 3, after the scheduled termination of South Africa's AGOA benefits.

"The incoming Congress takes office on 3 January 2027, while South Africa's exclusion is scheduled for 1 January. Preventing an interruption in benefits therefore requires action before the new congressional majorities assume office. Waiting for January would be a serious strategic mistake."

He identified three possible outcomes: negotiated reconsideration before January, congressional legislation to restore access, or exclusion proceeding despite diplomatic efforts.

Gale noted that legislation would face procedural hurdles and require presidential approval or sufficient congressional support to override a veto.

Exporters assess tariff exposure and alternative markets

President Cyril Ramaphosa described the exclusion as a setback and indicated that South Africa would pursue a bilateral trade agreement with the U.S.

"We want to focus on a bilateral trade agreement where both parties sit down and negotiate trade rules and mechanisms," Ramaphosa said.

The 60-day notice period provides time for further negotiations. Exporters must assess tariffs, shipment arrival dates, and contractual responsibility for additional duties.

Citrus shipments departing South Africa in December could enter U.S. customs after January 1, affecting pricing and buyer negotiations.

South Africa is also pursuing alternative markets through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), regional agreements, and other trading relationships. However, phytosanitary requirements, logistics, market access, and buyer demand could limit immediate redirection of export volumes.

The government has indicated that engagement with Washington will continue alongside efforts to support affected businesses.

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www.parliament.gov.za (https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/media-statement-committee-chairperson-ir-notes-proposed-withdrawal-south-africas-agoa-benefits)

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Source 2: eNCA (https://www.enca.com/business-top-stories-videos/ramaphosa-says-agoa-exclusion-creates-opportunity-new-us-trade-deal)

Source 3: Sowetan (https://www.sowetan.co.za/opinion/columnists/2026-11-04-dinko-boikanyo-sa-removal-from-agoa-which-us-orders-can-we-keep-and-where-do-we-sell-next/)

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