

Market access, WTO case, important priorities for South Africa's new Minister of Agriculture

South Africa's fresh fruit export industry look forward to work with the new Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen. They say while there are many priorities in his inbox, the most pressing are gaining and prioritising market access, the citrus industry appeal to the WTO with Europe, as well as implementing existing industry master plans to speed up their impact for the country.



Part of the South African pavilion team at a recent trade show.

Fhumulani Ratshitanga, CEO of the industry umbrella body Fruit South Africa: "It's important for the agriculture minister to demonstrate proficiency in the areas of policy formulation, legislation, and economic growth, as these have a significant

bearing on the viability of the fresh fruit industry, and certainly the agriculture sector at large. We are poised, as an industry, to work with the minister and his department to continue to grow this dynamic subsector in agriculture."

However, she notes the agricultural industry relies on many other ministries to function well. "It is important to note the requirement for strong cohesion between the national and provincial contexts, as a prerequisite for sustainable success in the sector. This also brings to mind the critical importance of robust collaboration between Minister Steenhuisen and the Ministers of Land Reform and Rural Development; the Presidency - where coordination of relevant public enterprises will reside; Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs; Police; Water and Sanitation; Public Works and Infrastructure, and Trade, Industry and Competition. All these portfolios have strong ties to the viability of the agriculture sector. And we hope that this approach will be echoed through the various MECs."

New government must support further industry growth

South Africa's fruit industry responded positively to the new Government of National Unity (GNU). "The voters have spoken, and political parties need to work together for the overall growth of the country. President Cyril Ramaphosa's composition of the cabinet seems to demonstrate a commitment to strengthened collaboration and constructive dialogue, both of which resonate strongly with the fresh fruit industry stance. Reflecting advancements in the agriculture sector, Q1 2024 showed a rise in the value of agricultural exports to 6% year-on-year, reaching \$3.1bn. The agriculture sector can maintain and even exceed this growth rate if we all work together. As a significant socio-economic contributor, the industry expects government to address relevant challenges to ensure its viability and sustainability," states Ratshitanga.

Citrus industry briefing

The citrus industry has already welcomed and invited Minister Steenhuisen to a briefing. The WTO case is the most pressing issue. Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern African (CGA), "We anticipate the Minister to be business friendly and to work hard on ensuring South Africa's competitiveness and sustainability. The WTO case is in process, and it is important that the Minister understands how crucial this case is for the citrus industry, and how we need a change in entry conditions into the EU for South African citrus. We need a Department that is much more agile and responsive to the market access needs of industry – in particular in addressing import requirements in India, USA and Japan. With his colleague at DTIC he needs to address the issue of import duties in Asia – South Africa's competitors have a big advantage."

The Democratic Alliance (DA) with Minister Steenhuisen, as leader of the party, has a good track record of running the Western Cape Department of Agriculture. "The CGA has worked closely with Minister Meyer in the Western Cape, and have jointly achieved a lot. We anticipate similar progress with Minister Steenhuisen," states Chadwick.

Implement agriculture master plan

Both Ratshitanga and Chadwick remind the Minister that a lot of work has already been done on the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP) for South Africa over the past few years. "We are signatories to the AAMP and would like to see its successful implementation, with all relevant role-players fully on board. It was heartening to hear minister Steenhuisen echo industry sentiments, rather than 're-inventing the wheel', this comprehensive plan simply needs accelerated implementation."

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