

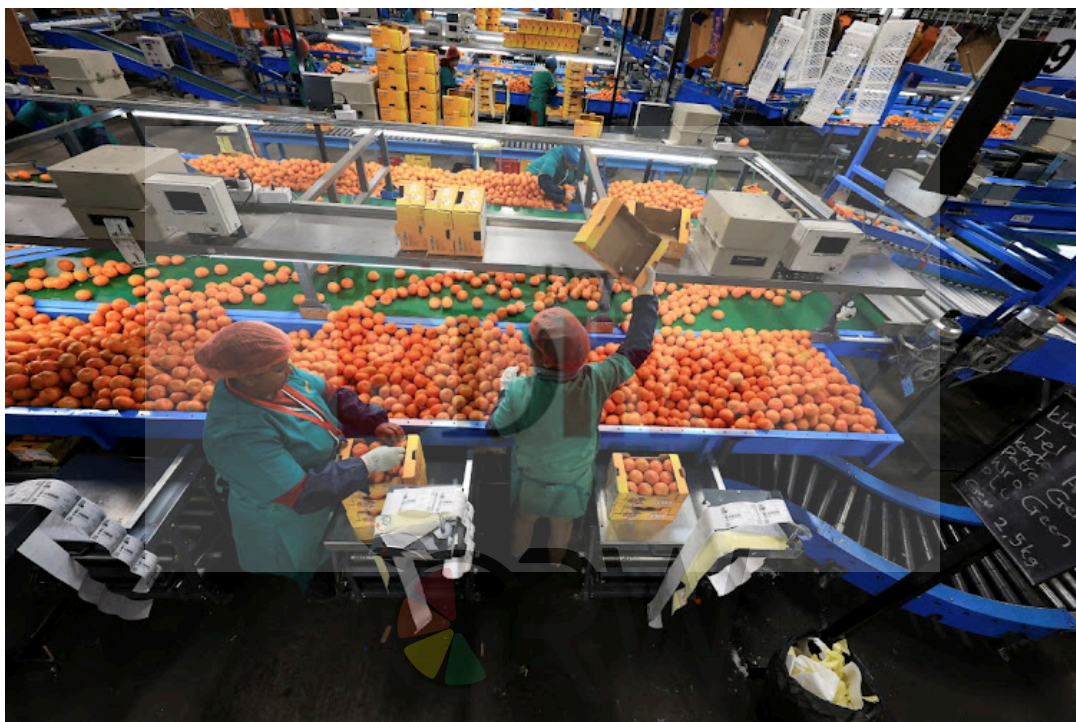
■ ECONOMY

We're fighting to save agriculture, says John Steenhuisen

Minister engaging with trade minister Parks Tau and other key ministers 'to highlight the urgency of the matter'

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by JANA MARX ECONOMICS CORRESPONDENT



Distribution workers pack tangerines at Goede Hoop Citrus in Citrusdal, Western Cape. REUTERS/ESA ALEXANDER

As the US confirmed 30% “reciprocal” tariffs on SA exports, the department of agriculture is doing “everything in its power to protect SA’s market access, save jobs and make trade a tool for shared prosperity — not a casualty of geopolitical realignment”.

Agriculture minister John Steenhuisen said they shared the agricultural sector’s deep concerns over the tariffs.

“These measures are deeply unjust and pose a serious threat to jobs, livelihoods and the competitiveness of one of SA’s most globally integrated sectors,” Steenhuisen told Business Day.

This comes as the SA Wine and the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) are once again appealing to the government to intensify negotiations to avoid long-term harm to trade, investment and employment in their sectors.

On Thursday last week the US confirmed the tariff wall on SA exports. The 30% tariffs are set to come into effect on Thursday, unless the government can negotiate a better deal.



DA leader John Steenhuisen. Picture: GALLO IMAGES/MISHA JORDAAN

SA's agriculture sector is heavily export-orientated, with exports worth \$13.7bn in 2024. While citrus accounts for less than 5% of total exports to the US, specific regions are much more reliant on the US market.

The total value of SA wine exports to the US amounts to about R660m a year, and the local wine industry supports about 270,000 workers across the value chain.

While the formal negotiations are being led by the department of trade, industry & competition, Steenhuisen said he had been engaging with trade minister Parks Tau and other key ministers "to highlight the urgency of the matter from the agricultural side".

"This is not just about trade policy; it's about farmworkers, exporters and rural economies that rely heavily on the US market," Steenhuisen said, adding that he had established a team within his department to support the negotiations with technical and market-specific input.

Christo Conradie, stakeholder engagement, market access & policy manager at SA Wine, said the tariff decision placed the industry at a severe disadvantage compared with countries that continue to benefit from lower tariffs.

“The US remains a key market for SA wine and maintaining access under fair terms is vital for the sustainability of our sector and broader agricultural value chain.”

Besides the direct impact, the SA Table Grape Industry (SATI) is concerned about potential secondary effects of the tariffs on global markets, “including increased supply from other countries facing high tariffs to SA’s main markets such as the EU and UK”.

According to SA Wine, losing access to the US market would affect the entire supply chain — affecting packaging, logistics, and foreign currency inflows — particularly in rural areas where the wine industry is a key economic driver. The same holds true for the citrus sector.

SA is a counter-seasonal citrus supplier to the US, with the primary export window running from July to October. SA does thus not compete with US counterparts — it merely supplements the US demand.

“[The impact] will be felt most acutely in rural communities in the Northern and Western Cape, the two provinces from which we export to the US,” CGA CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele said on Friday, noting that Brazilian orange juice had been exempted from US tariffs.

According to Ntshabele, the industry has passed the middle of the southern hemisphere’s citrus season, and local citrus growers have managed to accelerate a limited number of shipments to the US in the past weeks.

This has mitigated some of the effects of the tariff on the current season’s US exports, he said.

“But should a beneficial trade deal not be concluded, our next export season will feel the full effect of the tariff.”

Local markets were in a state of flux on Friday. While the rand lost ground in early trade, by market close it had reversed course to end the day 0.73% firmer at R18.03/\$.

After falling as much as 1.53%, the JSE recovered about half of those losses by the close, ending 0.79% off at 97,744 points.

While industrial metals and miners fared worst, their precious equivalents outperformed the market to gain 3.68%, as the prices of gold and platinum gained about 2% each.

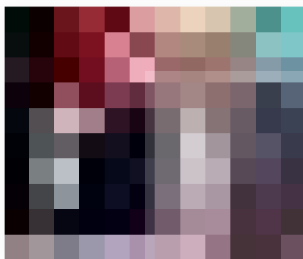
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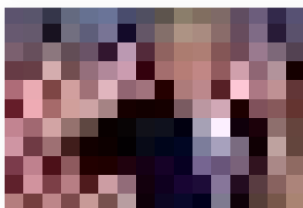
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