

South Africa's agricultural exports achieve record high in 2024

By Octavia Avesca Spandiel | 4 March 2025 | 1:45 pm

South Africa's agriculture sector achieved a record high US\$13,7 billion (about R255 billion) in export value in 2024, a 3% increase on the previous year, according to data from Trade Map.



Citrus was one of the leading agricultural export commodities for South Africa during 2024.

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An Agbiz report said that despite the mid-summer drought that hampered grain and oilseed production, robust fruit harvests, improved livestock conditions, and strong carry-over grain stocks from the previous season contributed to the sector's growth.

Wandile Sihlobo, chief economist at Agbiz, told *Farmer's Weekly* that despite infrastructure challenges, collaboration between Transnet, the private sector, and various logistical organisations had ensured the steady flow of agricultural exports.

Key export markets and products

According to the report, African countries remained the primary destination for South Africa's agricultural exports, accounting for 44% of total export value. Leading exports to African countries included maize, wheat, sugar, apples, pears, fruit juices, wine, and vegetable oils.

The report added that Asia and the Middle East were South Africa's second-largest agricultural export markets, making up a combined 21% of total exports. Leading exports to these regions included citrus, nuts, apples, pears, wool, berries, sugar, and beef.



The EU followed closely, with a 19% share, predominantly importing citrus, grapes, wine, avocados, fruit juices, and wool.

Exports to the Americas, including the US, accounted for 6%, with citrus, grapes, wine, and nuts leading exports.

The rest of the world, including the UK, comprised 10% of South Africa's agricultural exports.

The role of AGOA

The report said that the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) continued to play a crucial role in South Africa's agricultural trade with the US. The US currently accounted for 4% of South Africa's agricultural exports, with products such as citrus, grapes, wine, and fruit juices benefitting from AGOA's duty-free access.

Sihlobo said that potential exclusion from AGOA could lead to an average import duty of 3% on South African products entering the US, reducing the country's competitiveness on that market.

"If South Africa were removed from AGOA, our agricultural exports to the US would face tariffs that could make it harder to compete against countries with duty-free access," he said.

Agricultural imports and trade balance

According to Sihlobo, while exports soared, South Africa's agricultural imports also increased, reaching US\$7,6 billion (R141 billion), an 8% rise on the previous year.

The rise was driven by increased imports of wheat, palm oil, rice, poultry, and whisky.

South Africa's agricultural trade surplus also declined 2% to reach US\$6,2 billion (R115 billion), primarily due to the increase in the value of imports.

To sustain and expand agricultural exports, Sihlobo said strategic policy interventions were needed.

"South Africa must prioritise improvements in port and rail infrastructure, maintain strong trade relations, and expand into new markets, particularly within BRICS nations and key Asian markets like South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam," he said.

