SA agri exporters target new markets amid global trade shifts

South Africa's agricultural exporters are being urged to pivot towards non-traditional markets as geopolitical uncertainty and rising protectionism reshape global trade, according to Paul Makube, senior agricultural economist at FNB.

From left to right: Theo Boshoff, CEO of Agbiz; Christo Conradie, Market Access and Policy Manager, SA Wines; Gerrit van der Merwe, Chairman of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA); Paul Makube, Senior Agricultural Economist; John Steenhuisen, Minister of Agriculture in South Africa

Speaking at a side event of the G20 Agriculture Ministerial Meeting, Makube said South Africa's G2 presidency provides a platform to address challenges faced by exporters in an increasingly fragm market.

"Changing environments are requiring the agri sector to look to diversify markets. Agri market participants can help future-proof their export strategies by deepening relationships in non-traditi markets and by taking steps to actively build their trade resilience for the future," Makube said.

Citrus and beyond: Securing new markets

Makube highlighted the country's citrus industry as an example. Estimates for the current season been revised upwards to nearly 190 million cartons, up from 171 million earlier in the year, as mor orchards reach maturity.

"If we don't find new markets, we'll have more fruit than we can sell. That's why market diversificat isn't just a good idea – it's a commercial imperative," he cautioned.

Opportunities in Brics and Africa

Makube noted that markets in China and other BRICS nations offer significant potential, with impr tariff conditions and growing demand for Southern Hemisphere produce.

"We're already seeing zero-tariff access for key commodities like citrus, nuts, and meat into China that can be a game changer for many farmers. While India still poses high barriers, it's a massive a growing population coupled with a rising middle class, meaning it's a market worth cultivating. Th are the places where the next decade of growth for SA agri will almost certainly come from."

He also stressed the importance of deepening intra-African trade, with 44% of South Africa's agricultural exports already destined for the continent. "A diversified, modernised, more resilient a globally connected SA agricultural sector is possible and will be of huge benefit to all agri players country," Makube added.

Investing in long-term relationships

According to Makube, market development is a long-term game. Sustainable success relies on cultivating relationships rather than transactions. "It takes time to build networks in markets like C and the Middle East. You don't just flip a switch. We recommend using this window to establish ar strengthen those trade pathways," he said.