

South African exports to U.S. rose during tariff pause

South Africa's agricultural exports to the United States rose by 26% in the second quarter of 2025, reaching US\$161 million, despite concerns over potential tariff hikes and market access. Data from the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (Agbiz) showed citrus, wine, fruit juices, and nuts drove the increase.

Wandile Sihlobo, Agbiz chief economist, said exporters may have taken advantage of the 90-day pause on higher tariffs. "It appears that some exporters may have taken advantage of the 90-day pause on the higher tariffs and exported more volume than usual during that period," he said. He added, "The fact that South Africa generally has a large fruit harvest also contributed to this enormous increase, which far surpassed the average typical quarterly growth in exports to the U.S., which is about 9%."

Sihlobo noted that while the U.S. market is important for certain producers, its share of national exports has remained stable since the start of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). "From now on, a great deal hinges on whether South Africa succeeds in securing favourable trade terms with the U.S. The future performance of the exports to the U.S. will rely mainly on the success of the ongoing conversations between the two countries," he said.

He stressed that diversification is urgent as the sector grows. "Our primary focus is to work diligently to maintain our existing markets in the EU, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. It is also crucial for South Africa to expand market access to some key BRICS countries, such as China, India, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt," he said. "The discussion in BRICS should move beyond the general rhetoric of intentions to meaningful trade arrangements."

Jaco Minnaar, president of Agri SA, said the larger crop and efforts to ship before tariffs were imposed both contributed. "The 90-day extension helped with this. Markets are fluent, and products are flowing to markets with the least resistance, but they keep flowing/moving. As our products are very seasonal, we will have to have a whole year's data to really see the effects of the tariffs," he said. He added that industries are seeking new or alternate markets, while negotiations with the U.S. continue.

TLU SA general manager, Bennie van Zyl, said exporters used the 90 days to their advantage. "If the normal market used to be the American market, they will use that and actually export to the United States as much as they can before the tariffs become a reality," he said. "At this stage, there are official groupings in the United States as well as a lot of civilian groupings trying to get a better deal with the United States regarding this 30%."

Source: Business Report (<https://persfin.co.za/economy/2025-09-25-south-africa-sees-a-26-surge-in-agricultural-exports-to-the-us-amidst-tariff-concerns/>)

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