



Debate on Vote 29: Agriculture (Good Hope Chamber)

Honourable Speaker, fellow Members of Parliament, and South Africans,

Today, I am proud to reflect on the work being done under the leadership of Minister John Steenhuisen in the Department of Agriculture to showcase the DA Difference.

Guided by 7 clear priorities, Minister Steenhuisen has championed reforms that are not only revitalising our agricultural sector but also creating jobs, driving inclusive growth, and empowering the next generation of commercial farmers.

1. Partnerships for Growth

At the core of his approach lies a firm belief in public-private partnerships. Minister Steenhuisen has forged strong ties with businesses such as Unilever that not only train but also ensures a sustainable market for 100 emerging farmers of herbs and peppers in Jozini, KZN. The partnership with SAB — integrating emerging producers into its Corona lime supply chain — is a shining example of how inclusive value chains can uplift emerging farmers while sustaining local economies. These partnerships have created pathways to profitability and job creation, showing that transformation and productivity can go hand in hand.

2. Legislative and Regulatory Review

Minister Steenhuisen understands that innovation cannot flourish under outdated laws. That's why at the AVI All Africa Conference, he announced a comprehensive review of outdated legislation, regulations and administrative systems, these reforms include laws governing fertilizers, and GMOs. By cutting red tape and modernising agricultural regulations, the department is clearing the way for biotech innovation, safer food systems, and faster product development — all essential ingredients for a competitive and modern economy.

3. Improved Market Access

Access to markets determines whether a farmer thrives or fails. This year, under the Minister's leadership, we celebrated the reopening of apple exports to Thailand, ending a 16-year hiatus. Our trade reach has also expanded into China, Vietnam, and the EU through enhanced phytosanitary protocols and streamlined export systems. These gains don't just grow exports — they sustain agri-processing jobs, foreign income, and rural development.

4. Effective Support for Farmers

Support must be practical, not patronising. The blended finance scheme has unlocked R5.8 billion in capital for 381 emerging commercial farmers, empowering them to grow beyond survivalist operations.



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Through the PPECB Market Readiness Program, over 300 smallholder farmers were trained in export certification and compliance. These efforts are building a new class of agri-entrepreneurs who are job creators, not just land recipients.

5. Strengthened Biosecurity

Nothing threatens rural livelihoods more than disease outbreaks. Minister Steenhuisen has responded decisively by strengthening biosecurity regulations, particularly after uncovering regulatory gaps that had previously allowed some industry players to bypass restrictions on moving animals from disease-affected areas. He also initiated a first of its kind mass vaccination program to contain threats of avian flu and foot-and-mouth disease, with this protecting billions in agricultural value and the jobs that depend on it — particularly in the livestock and poultry sectors where emerging farmers are most vulnerable.

6. Advocacy for a Growing Sector

Agriculture does not operate in isolation. It depends on efficient ports, secure roads, and access to energy and digital infrastructure. Minister Steenhuisen consistently advocates for improvements in rural infrastructure, port operations, and broadband access. This is now becoming a reality with the assistance of another DA Minister for Communications and Digital Technologies, Solly Malatsi's actions to open the market with the relaxation of regulations that allows for low orbit satellite internet providers. The DA sees agriculture not as a sector on the margins, but as a key driver of job creation and national recovery, especially in underdeveloped regions.

7. Improved Food Security

Finally, the expansion of community seed banks in Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and North West — with plans for KZN and the Northern Cape — is a vital step toward seed sovereignty, food independence, and the preservation of indigenous crops. These banks ensure that our smallholder farmers can continue planting even in the face of droughts, climate change, and market shocks.

In conclusion, under Minister John Steenhuisen and the Democratic Alliance, the Department of Agriculture has become a beacon of good governance, smart investment, and inclusive opportunity. We are proving that with the right leadership, agriculture can be a springboard out of poverty, a creator of jobs, and a backbone of sustainable growth.

Let us continue to invest, innovate, and be inclusive — so that every farmer, no matter where they start, can contribute to feeding our nation and growing our economy.

Thank you.

FREEDOM. FAIRNESS. OPPORTUNITY. DIVERSITY.