



Democratic Alliance
Email: info@da.org.za
www.da.org.za
P.O. Box 1475, Cape Town, 8000

Debate on Budget Vote 29: Agriculture

Honourable Chairperson,
Honourable Minister,
Honourable Members of Parliament in the NCOP, and most importantly,
My fellow South Africans,
Good day, Thobela, Good day.

Agriculture contributes nearly 3% to South Africa's GDP, but when considering the entire value chain, that figure rises to almost 12%. Equally important, the sector accounts for approximately 10% of formal employment in the country.

It is both fitting and encouraging that Agriculture now functions as a standalone department, and under the leadership of Minister Steenhuisen, we are already seeing the green shoots of what is possible.

In fact, agriculture was the biggest contributor to GDP growth in the first quarter of this year, growing by more than 15%. This demonstrates the power of focused leadership and a sector that, if well-supported, can anchor South Africa's recovery. And according to StatsSA "without the boost from Agriculture, GDP would have contracted by 0.3%"

As members of the Select Committee, we scrutinised the Annual Performance Plan (APP) and the department's budget into the late hours of the night.

Several key priorities stood out, none more so than the proposed investment in young, small, and emerging farmers.

Chairperson, it is deeply concerning that the average age of a South African farmer is 62 years old. These farmers currently sustain a large portion of our



food security. Within the APP, however, we now see seeds being planted, literally and figuratively, for the next generation of farmers.

This plan goes beyond distributing tractors and bags of feed. It recognises that market access is the true barrier for many small-scale farmers. They can grow food, yes, but without integration into the broader value chain, their efforts cannot translate into economic growth or food security. Connecting farmers to markets, to each other, and to communities is key.

Risks do remain, biosecurity chief among them. Foot-and-mouth disease continues to pose a serious threat, but recent progress has been encouraging. The importation of millions of vaccine doses from Botswana has helped stem the tide.

Encouragingly, these imports are only temporary as the Minister has already begun work to ensure domestic vaccine production resumes at Onderstepoort, marking a major step in securing long-term biosecurity.

As the Minister rightly pointed out, South Africa will never be entirely free of foot-and-mouth disease, due to transmission from buffalo in our many game reserves. But with proper management and cooperation from all agricultural stakeholders, we can protect our export markets and keep the sector secure.

For too long, the vaccine programme and biosecurity infrastructure were neglected. But as the DA, we welcome the current direction and the promise it holds for the sector.

Another highlight of the department is its plan to reduce dependency on external contractors. For years, contractors have bled the public sector dry, often delivering substandard services at inflated costs. We are pleased to see a commitment to utilising in-house government skills and resources. This is long overdue.



Democratic Alliance
Email: info@da.org.za
www.da.org.za
P.O. Box 1475, Cape Town, 8000

Chairperson, we must remember: a plan is only as strong as its implementation. Budgets can be balanced and policies well-written, but they mean little if the officials responsible for execution are not held to account. We've all seen that, not all that glitters is gold.

What gives me real hope, however, is the Minister's consistent engagement with farmers and farm workers, on the ground, every week. There is no substitute for listening directly to those who live in this sector daily.

Ask a biologist about maize meal, and they'll tell you about ideal growing conditions. Ask them to plant maize for a nation and they will likely fail. Ask an economist how to grow the sector, and you'll receive figures, forecasts, and models. But speak to a farmer, and you'll get the lived wisdom of generations. And it is that wisdom that must inform our way forward in obtaining food security.

Chairperson, farmers remain concerned, and justifiably so. Fluctuating commodity prices, unpredictable weather patterns, farm murders and rural safety, and the spectre of unconstitutional land expropriation without compensation all cast a long shadow.

But hope remains and with this department's new direction, there is cause for optimism.

As the Democratic Alliance, and as a public representative from Limpopo, we will remain steadfast in our support for the people on the ground who feed this nation. We will hold the department accountable for delivery, and we will push for an agricultural sector that is sustainable, inclusive, and secure.

Thank you. Baie dankie. Siyabonga.