



Democratic Alliance
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Debate on Budget Vote 29: Agriculture

Honourable Chairperson,
Honourable Members, and
Fellow South Africans, Good day.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself.” These words resonate deeply in a country like South Africa, where agriculture is not just about food, it is about land, livelihood, dignity, and long-term opportunity.

Agriculture is one of our nation’s most critical sectors. It anchors food security, uplifts rural economies, and offers a meaningful pathway to inclusive growth and sustainable employment.

This year, with a budget of R7.6 billion (2025/26 budget, the Department of Agriculture is positioned to deepen its impact. The Strategic Plan and APP are well-aligned with the National Development Plan, the Medium-Term Development Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, SDG 2 - Zero Hunger, which calls for ending hunger, achieving food security, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Under the current leadership, we are beginning to see signs of coordinated progress.

Let’s begin with trade, an area where the Minister’s leadership has delivered visible results.

New and expanded markets for our produce, from citrus to apples, from avocados to wool to wine, have brought renewed energy to farming communities. These export gains are creating jobs, driving investment, and improving livelihoods across the country.

On food security, the Department’s steady hand has also been evident.

Amidst global price volatility, the relative stability of staple food costs, such as bread, is no small achievement. This is a direct result of sound domestic grain support, value chain collaboration, and timely interventions by the Minister which, though quiet in nature, bring real relief to South African households.

Chairperson, it is equally important to reflect on the tone of leadership and the strategic intent guiding the Department.

The focus on responsiveness, alignment, and delivery is not only commendable, it is beginning to reflect in several programme areas. But as is often the case in a sector as complex as agriculture, not all interventions move at the same pace.

Emerging farmers, in particular, remain a constituency that requires sustained attention.



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While the political will is evident, practical challenges persist, especially at provincial and local levels. Many smallholder farmers still struggle to access markets, infrastructure, and tailored support. This is not a failure of vision, but a reminder of the implementation complexities we must navigate.

One practical policy response lies in expanding public-private partnerships that equip emerging farmers with business development support, technical training, and secure market access. This model, when implemented well, can close the gap between land access and commercial viability.

We have already seen the impact of such partnerships in provinces like the Western Cape, where blended finance models and farmer support units have helped over 70% of supported land reform farms remain productive, a noteworthy contrast to national averages. These models deserve replication and refinement, not only in one province, but across the country.

There is therefore an opportunity, and indeed a need, to enhance the visibility and accountability of emerging farmer programmes. By tracking not only inputs but outcomes, we can ensure that where success is achieved, it is scaled, and where support falls short, timely adjustments are made.

Infrastructure constraints also remain a challenge, particularly in logistics and market access.

Delays at ports, cold-chain inefficiencies, and rural road infrastructure gaps limit both export potential and internal competitiveness. It is encouraging that the Department is working with Transnet and other partners to address these. Greater interdepartmental coordination and urgency in resolving these bottlenecks will go a long way in supporting producers and exporters alike.

On sustainability, the Department deserves recognition for its forward-looking approach.

Climate-smart agriculture, water conservation, and land rehabilitation are rightly positioned as strategic imperatives. The inclusion of these in the Strategic Plan signals a growing awareness that agriculture must adapt to climate realities. The challenge now is to accelerate implementation, especially in vulnerable, drought-prone areas.

There is also scope to improve value chain efficiencies, particularly in reducing post-harvest losses.

Food that is grown but not consumed represents lost income and lost opportunity, particularly for smaller producers. Targeted investments in cold storage, transport coordination, and digital tracking systems can improve margins and enhance food security outcomes.

Chairperson, the strategic foundations of this Department are sound.

The Minister's calm stewardship, clear direction, and open engagement with stakeholders have created a platform for results. We now need to ensure that the supporting systems, particularly at the provincial level, are equipped to deliver.

As Parliament, our role is to provide oversight, but also to enable progress, especially where departments are showing traction.

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Let us therefore support this Department to stay the course but accelerate where necessary. Let us demand measurable outcomes but acknowledge the complexity of the terrain. And let us work together to make agriculture not just a policy pillar, but a real engine of economic inclusion and rural renewal.

Because at its core, agriculture is not just about crops and commodities. It is about food on tables. It is about dignity restored. And it is about building a country that leaves no one behind.

I thank you.