



Democratic Alliance
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Debate on Vote 29: Agriculture

Honourable Chairperson,

Agriculture is the backbone of our economy, it is a cornerstone of employment, and it is a vital pillar in the fight against poverty. Our farmers are deserved of only the best and this budget will take us closer in providing that to them.

Allow me to extend our sincere appreciation to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Mr. John Steenhuisen, for his steadfast leadership and the strides his department continues to make in transforming this critical sector. His unwavering commitment to inclusive growth, bio-security, modernization of agriculture, and the pursuit of food security is commendable, and it led to Agriculture being the fastest growing sector of our economy in the first quarter of this year.

This appropriation represents more than a monetary commitment, it is a statement of intent. It is a call to action to ensure food security, to support smallholder producers, to enhance bio-security, to expand markets and to develop sustainable infrastructure. However, it is also a budget that demands accountability and strategic execution.

Honourable Chairperson, the Portfolio Committee has made several important recommendations that we must endorse if this budget is to achieve its intended outcomes.

The Minister as well as the Committee has rightly emphasised the urgent need to address South Africa's bio-security crisis, particularly the recurring Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreaks. Our national herd, and by extension our food security, is under threat whilst the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) have for many years, regrettably, failed to live up to their core mandates.

The ARC's delay in constructing the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Vaccine Facility is a national embarrassment. It is shameful that over a decade after the first money for this facility were allocated to ARC, we still have to import Foot-and-Mouth Disease vaccines from Botswana. These failures led to livestock farmers being left vulnerable, exports being lost, and rural economies suffering.

While we commend the efforts of OBP to address backlogs and install new freeze driers, the reality is that OBP is not meeting its vaccine production targets and continues to underperform. OBP's Good Manufacturing Process (GMP) certification project is years behind schedule, and management instability persists.

Hon Chairperson, the risks that outbreaks such as the current Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreak poses to food security and jobs in our country showed us once more the importance of getting these vaccine manufacturing facilities completed as a matter of utmost urgency. The risks associated with not being able to provide proper bio-security far outweigh the costs required to complete these facilities.



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We therefore welcome Minister Steenhuisen's undertaking to continue to liaise with the Minister of Finance, to consider reprioritisation of funds from underperforming programmes and non-critical activities to address bio-security challenges such as Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreaks, whilst also intensifying efforts to acquire additional funding for these facilities.

Despite these and various other challenges, we must commend the Minister and the Department for their strategic alignment with the Medium-Term Development Plan. The minister's commitment to modernising legislation, supporting smallholder producers, and unlocking land for production, are key levers for inclusive economic growth, and his focus on increasing participation in agriculture by upcoming farmers of all races, expanding market access, and investing in bio-security and infrastructure is visionary.

Geagte Voorsitter, al hierdie dinge kan egter nie gebeur vir so lank as wat ons boere onder voortdurende aanval is, en plaasmoorde, landelike veiligheid en veediefstal nie behoorlik aangespreek word nie. Die tyd het aangebreek dat plaasmoorde as 'n prioriteitsmisdaad in Suid-Afrika verklaar word. Ons boerderygemeenskappe is onder beleg, en die wreedheid van hierdie aanvalle is nie net 'n menslike tragedie nie, dit is 'n bedreiging vir ons voedselsekerheid, vir landelike stabiliteit, en vir ons nasionale moraal.

Die DA loof Minister Steenhuisen vir sy optrede om hierdie dringende saak tydens sy gesprek met die VSA se president, Donald Trump in die Withuis aan te spreek, en die wêreld daarop te wys dat die veiligheid van ons boere nie onderhandelbaar is nie. Die Parlement moet nou Minister Steenhuisen se vasberadenheid deurvoer deur te verseker dat ons hierdie gruweldade met die erns wat dit vereis, prioritiseer.

Honourable Speaker, this budget vote is more than a balance sheet, it is a blueprint for our country's agricultural future. It is a call to renew our institutions, to restore accountability, and to reinvest in our farmers who put food on our tables. With the increase in export tariffs from the US that were announced yesterday, our farmers will need this assistance more than ever.

Let us support this appropriation with the clear understanding that oversight must be vigilant, that performance must be measured, and failure, where it occurs, must be addressed without fear or favour.

Agbare Voorsitter, landbou is nie net ons verlede en ons hede nie, dit is ons toekoms! Die boere van Suid-Afrika, wit, swart en bruin, groot en klein, is ons land se ruggraat en ons is dit aan hulle verskuldig om seker te maak dat ons hierdie begroting tot hulle voordeel sal aanwend. Met die leiding van Minister Steenhuisen is ek oortuig daarvan dat ons daarin sal slaag!

Ek dank u.