

Highlighting South Africa's agricultural matters in G20 engagements

- Domestic policies generally guide agricultural developments here at home. That said, gatherings such as this past weekend's G20 Summit always provide an opportunity to mobilize support and generate global policy discourse around particular issues. These gatherings also provide an opportunity for policymakers and business leaders to connect with other countries and strengthen ties. This was particularly the approach of South Africa at the G20 Summit. For example, the South Africa–European Union (SA-EU) Bilateral Summit on November 20, emphasized the need for cooperation, investment and deepening trade. Various agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) were signed, including those on critical minerals and energy. For us in agriculture, deepening relations with the EU, one of our most important export markets, is key to the long-term growth of the sector in this fractured global trade order.
- While South Africa has faced challenges across various sectors, including citrus, poultry, and beverages, the EU remains one of its critical trading partners. In 2024, the EU was South Africa's third-largest agricultural market, accounting for 19% of our US\$13.7 billion in exports. Citrus, grapes, wines, dates, avocados, pineapples, fruit juices, apples and pears, berries, apricots and cherries, nuts, and wool are amongst the top agricultural products South Africa exported to the EU. Notably, the EU has remained South Africa's major trading partner through to 2025. In fact, in the third quarter of 2025, the EU remained South Africa's third-largest agricultural market, accounting for a 23% share of US\$4.7 billion in exports.
- On November 21, South Africa also had another critical bilateral meeting with Australia. We do not typically consider Australia when we think of trade in South African agriculture. However, we have trade in other sectors, such as the automotive industry, and investments across various other sectors of the economy. South Africa and Australia's agricultural sectors are more similar. Still, there remains room for collaboration between our countries in a range of areas that could further boost our agricultural sectors. One area we can draw on from the Australian experience, which is urgent for us in South Africa, is biosecurity. We are currently struggling with foot-and-mouth disease in South Africa's livestock industry, and a collaboration with Australia in this area would be valuable.
- Moreover, Australia's work on climate-smart agricultural practices and its cooperation with the private sector to advance research are other areas of learning for South Africa. The Australian government equips farmers with sound research and pathways to reduce emissions and produce in more environmentally friendly ways. These are also vital to global agricultural trade today. Therefore, these high-level bilateral meetings between South African and Australian political leaders are essential in opening a pathway for more direct engagements at the departmental and industry levels.

- Also on November 21, we saw South Africa sign an MoU on agricultural matters with Vietnam. The MoU focuses on expanded cooperation in crop production, plant protection, animal husbandry, veterinary services, research, development, technology transfer and agricultural trade. These are all key areas for our farming sector.
- Admittedly, the MoUs won't lead to sudden changes or the opening of markets. Trade agreements are needed for that. Still, they help maintain close relationships and collaboration, which are key to establishing trade agreements. Vietnam is a market we keep on our radar in agriculture. The country spends over US\$30 billion on agricultural imports annually. But if one looks at Vietnam's agricultural products suppliers, South Africa doesn't feature prominently. South Africa ranked 34th among agricultural suppliers to Vietnam.
- In 2024, Vietnam imported US\$34 billion worth of agricultural products. South Africa accounted for only 0.3% of these imports (about US\$89 million). The key suppliers of agricultural products to Vietnam were China, Brazil, the United States, Argentina, Cambodia, Australia, India, and Indonesia, collectively accounting for 70% of the country's agricultural imports. This happens, although the products Vietnam imports are generally similar to those South Africa exports to various parts of the world. Among other things, the hindrance to trade remains tariffs and phytosanitary barriers. These could be resolved through trade agreements. Still, the path to such agreements will benefit from cooperation, as seen in these MoUs.
- In essence, South Africa's agriculture is export-oriented, and already exports roughly half of the agricultural produce in value terms. The G20 networking opportunities helped the country take a step forward in reaffirming its commitments to existing trade relations, such as with the EU, while starting conversations with new partners, including Vietnam. These are not the only engagements that benefited agriculture, but we highlighted them as an example. However, we stress that more work lies ahead to turn these engagements into long-lasting economic opportunities. That work must start immediately.

WEEKLY HIGHLIGHT

The G20 Leaders' Declaration emphasizes the importance of agricultural growth in resolving global food insecurity

- The G20 Leaders' Declaration placed a strong focus on agriculture, recognizing the sector's role in strengthening global food security. On this, the G20 Leaders Declaration correctly states that: "We therefore reiterate our commitment to ensuring resilient and sustainable food systems and food security through open and non-discriminatory trade policies consistent with WTO rules."
- The Declaration further adds that: "We note that modernizing agriculture and food system's resilience can be enhanced through land, soil biodiversity, energy and water management, reducing food waste,

adaptation and mitigation, support for sustainable technologies, innovations and approaches and investment in smallholder and family farmers while promoting the inclusion and the empowerment of women and youth, strengthening local food production, resilient and improved food value chains..."

- This is a bold and welcome statement affirming commitments to the WTO rules in global agriculture. South Africa's agricultural sector is export-led, and the WTO plays an essential role in ensuring fairness in international trade. The fairness of global trade is also key to ensuring that the world can achieve food security through trade, amongst other interventions.
- Moreover, adaptation to climate change will require significant effort and coordination among the government, industry stakeholders, and research institutions. Over the years, South Africa has prioritized technological advancements, including improved seed cultivars and animal genetics, as well as appropriate and safe applications of agrochemicals and fertilizers.
- While others have called for a drastic reduction in the use of agrichemicals, the South African government and organized agriculture have consistently emphasized the appropriate and balanced application of agrochemicals, ensuring their safe use for humans and the environment. We must be guided by science rather than rhetoric and politics on food matters. We take it that the G20 Leaders Declaration's focus on sustainable technologies and innovation encompasses such approaches as those of South Africa.
- Beyond South African agricultural matters, the G20 placed a necessary spotlight on the challenge of poverty, which remains a reality on the African continent. Unlocking agrarian productivity across the continent will help ensure we overcome this challenge. The gains from such won't be easy or achieved overnight, as they require reframing agriculture across the continent, with a necessary focus on commercial production while supporting smallholder farmers. The interventions also need improvement in land governance, the adoption of technology (improved seed cultivars and genetics), the appropriate and safe use of agrochemicals and fertilizers, open trade and minimal government intervention, investment in network infrastructure, and the embrace of organized agriculture, amongst other things. These are all lessons that can be drawn from South Africa's agricultural story for the good of the African continent.

WEEK AHEAD

What are we watching this week?

- We start on the global front, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expected to release its weekly **U.S. Crop Progress** report today. The crop harvest is nearly complete nationwide, and yields are decent. Still, the harvest is slightly behind last season's. For example, on November 16, about 91% of the maize crop had already been harvested, compared with 98% in the same week in 2024.

- Moreover, the USDA will release its weekly **U.S. Grains and Oilseed Export Sales** data scheduled for Thursday.
- On the domestic front, on Wednesday, the South African Grain Information Services (SAGIS) will release its weekly data on South Africa's Grain and Oilseed **Producer Deliveries**. In the previous release on November 14, South African farmers delivered 47,593 tonnes of new-season maize to commercial silos. This was the 29th weekly delivery for the new season, bringing the overall maize deliveries so far to 14.64 million tonnes. South Africa's 2024-25 maize harvest is estimated at 16.32 million tonnes, a 27% increase year-on-year, primarily due to expected annual yield improvements.
- The 2025-26 oilseeds marketing year began at the start of March 2025. In the first 37 weeks, soybean producer deliveries totalled 2.69 million tonnes, accounting for 97% of the expected harvest of 2.75 million tonnes. In the case of sunflower seeds, the first 37 weeks of the new 2025-26 marketing year's producer deliveries totalled 693,748 tonnes, of the expected harvest of 708,300 tonnes.
- South Africa's 2025-26 winter wheat season began in October. But we are seeing that farmers are moving quickly to deliver the new season's crop to commercial silos. This crop was planted from the start of May. In the first seven weeks of this 2026-27 marketing year, farmers have delivered about 834,769 tonnes of wheat to commercial silos. These are still early days, and the harvest is expected to gain momentum in the coming months. South Africa's 2025-26 winter wheat harvest is forecast at 2.03 million tonnes, a 5% increase from the previous year.
- On Thursday, Statistics South Africa will release the **Producer Price Index (PPI)** data for October 2025. Our focus on these data will be on the food category.
- Also on Thursday, SAGIS will publish its **weekly South Africa's Grains and Oilseeds Trade** data. In the week of November 14, South Africa exported 52,565 tonnes of maize, with approximately 61% going to Zimbabwe, and the remainder to other countries in the Southern African region. This placed South Africa's 2025-26 maize exports at 1.01 million tonnes, out of the expected seasonal exports of 2.24 million tonnes. The current marketing year only ends in April 2026. We will likely see more robust export activity later in early 2026, when demand in the region is expected to be strong.
- While South Africa has an ample harvest and will remain a net exporter of maize, minor imports of yellow maize from Argentina are expected to continue for South Africa's coastal regions. For example, so far in the 2025-26 marketing year, South Africa has imported 77,524 tonnes of yellow maize for feed in the country's coastal regions. These importers mainly take advantage of the affordable prices of Argentinian supplies.
- South Africa is a net wheat importer, and November 14 marked the seventh week of the new 2025-26 marketing year. The cumulative imports to date have totalled 352,770 tonnes from the United States, Latvia, Australia, Lithuania, Russia and Poland. We expect South Africa's 2025-26 wheat imports to reach 1.74 million tonnes, down from 1.83 million tonnes in the 2024-25 marketing year, due to a slight recovery in the domestic harvest.

- Moreover, the Crop Estimates Committee (CEC) will release the **final production estimate for summer field crops for 2025** on Thursday. On the same day, the CEC will release the **fourth winter cereals production forecast for 2025**.

