

June 8, 2026

Key themes that dominated discussions at the Agbiz 2026 Congress

- We had two days of engaging conversations in Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape, during the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (Agbiz)'s 2026 Congress. The conversations ranged from threats posed by rising geopolitical tensions to international trade and export diversification opportunities, economic diplomacy, Southern African Customs Union (SACU) reforms, agricultural finance, and structural reforms in the South African economy, among other topics.
- From the outset, the agribusinesses deliberated on the changing trade environment, with a clear view of how to strengthen South Africa's position as one of the key agricultural exporters at a time when some markets are becoming harder to access, and conflicts are disrupting trade. The central theme in all discussions was that the African continent, the EU, the United Kingdom, the Americas, and Asia remain key markets for South Africa. The country must work to maintain and deepen access in these markets, while also expanding access for products that do not yet enjoy preferential or lower-tariff access.
- Reflecting on the medium to long-term outlook, there was broad consensus that the Middle East and Asia remain critical strategic regions with potential to expand access to various agricultural products. These are the agricultural export growth regions, in addition to the access we enjoy elsewhere. Securing better tariff access to several of these new markets will require South Africa to negotiate bilateral trade agreements with some countries.
- It is in this desire for better access to new markets that the various participants and speakers at the Congress noted the need for South Africa to align its foreign policy and trade policy more rigorously going forward. Fortunately, we received a word of comfort from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) that the new Economic Diplomacy has begun to prioritise trade and investment much more strongly than before. There was, however, recognition that a stronger economic diplomacy strategy alone will not suffice. We also need well-equipped people at South Africa's missions around the world. South Africa has over 100 missions globally, which should play a vital role in promoting trade and investment opportunities in South Africa, amongst other things. This is an area that agricultural stakeholders will continue to advance through various engagements with the government.
- Also prominent in the discussions in Gqeberha was the need to urgently review SACU, with the end goal of allowing South Africa some flexibility to engage in bilateral trade agreements. In the current set-up, where South Africa must engage on trade issues collectively with other SACU members, the country has not moved quickly enough or with the necessary urgency to open new markets to serve South African business and society. The world is changing, and countries are forming new trade agreements. South Africa risks being left behind if our approach to SACU is not urgently reviewed.

- Moreover, trade agreements alone will not be enough to boost exports. Thus, we devoted one afternoon to focusing on reforms in the network industries. Improving the efficiency of ports and rail was the key issue that arose from the network industries discussion. The input from the Transnet leadership was that they are open to collaboration with organised agriculture, agribusiness, and private-sector stakeholders to ensure continued improvement. Rural crime is among the issues discussed, as it typically hinders agricultural growth and investment in the sector.
- Also worth noting is that the delegates at the Congress devoted time to discussing biosecurity, including both plant and animal health issues. South Africa has been plagued by foot and mouth disease and African swine fever, all presenting immense costs to the sector. Thus, a discussion of long-term interventions to address these issues and improve plant health was part of the conference agenda.
- Overall, the Agbiz 2026 Congress's discussions centred on deepening collaboration between government, business, organised agriculture, and other social partners to ensure the sector continues to grow.

WEEKLY HIGHLIGHT

The SA government takes steps to release land with title deeds for farmers

- We typically don't comment much on the Budget Vote speeches. Still, the Presidency's Budget Vote speech delivered by President Cyril Ramaphosa on June 2, 2026, carried vital messages for the long-term growth of South Africa's agriculture. Amongst other things, the President stated that "Access to productive land is essential to grow our agricultural output further, create jobs and lift people out of poverty. Over time, the government has acquired around 2.5 million hectares of land under the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy programme."
- He further stated that "This land has generally been leased to beneficiaries on a short-term basis, which limits their ability to borrow money, invest in the land, grow agricultural production and contribute to the rural economy." We concur with this message and believe that the lack of title deeds has been the major constraint to the progress of inclusive growth in South Africa's agriculture. With the President now signalling the start of the title deeds release process, we may start to see some positive action to grow the sector.
- The President further stated that "As part of our efforts to revitalise rural economies, to strengthen land rights and support the inclusion of black farmers in commercial agriculture, we have embarked on a concerted programme to release this land with title deeds to deserving beneficiaries. The Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development will outline the details of the programme to convert agricultural leases to title deeds."

- Essentially, the step South Africa is taking now is fundamental to achieving the goals that have long been outlined in Chapter Six of the National Development Plan and, thereafter, in the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan. Both documents indicated the potential to grow the sector and create new jobs. In fact, the National Development Plan indicates that the sector and its value chain have the potential to create close to a million new jobs. Part of the prerequisites for those jobs was through strengthening land rights and allocating the land in the government's books to the deserving beneficiaries. Over time, South Africa's primary agriculture sector delivered jobs, from 718k at the end of 2012, when the National Development Plan was published, to 960k in the first quarter of 2026. The sector's value chain also created employment during this period.
- Still, these job gains were far below the nearly million jobs the National Development Plan envisaged in the sector and its value chain. Part of the constraints on job gains was the slow progress in releasing land with title deeds. Now that the President has issued a directive to release this land with title deeds, we see greater opportunities for growth and job creation in the sector.
- The land will be primarily used for commercial farming. This means the financing and training of the new beneficiaries are among the considerations that will be reflected when the Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development release the details of this process in the coming weeks and months.
- Essentially, releasing the land will be a powerful step to boosting inclusive growth in agriculture. This land is also key to ensuring we finally make progress in implementing the Agriculture and Agro-process Master Plan (AAMP). Importantly, organised agriculture, labour, and agribusinesses, among other key stakeholders, will continue to play a role in boosting inclusive growth in the sector, having been involved in drafting the AAMP.
- Overall, agriculture remains one of the sectors of our economy with potential for growth and job creation. The President's important step to strengthen land rights is key to realising this vision and supporting the rural economies. Importantly, this is also a crucial signal that property rights are intact in South Africa and that investment in farming is protected.

What are we watching this week?

- As always, we start the week by looking at the global front, and today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will release its **weekly U.S. crop progress report**, which provides insight into planting activity in maize, rice, sorghum, soybeans, and other major grains for the 2026-27 production season. Planting has progressed notably across the U.S. For example, about 93% of the intended maize area had already been planted by May 31, which is mildly ahead of the five-year average planting progress. Moreover, about 87% of the intended soybean area had already been planted, ahead of the five-year average.
- On Thursday, the USDA will release the **U.S. Crop Production Annual Report**. This annual report contains crop production data for the past year for grains and oilseeds, sugar crops, cotton, tobacco,

and others. Information on area planted and harvested, yield, and production is provided by type of crop, as well as the planted and harvested area, yield, and production of crops in the U.S. cumulatively.

- On the domestic front, on Tuesday, Statistics South Africa will release its **first quarter of 2026 GDP data**. Our focus on these figures will be on the agricultural gross value added. We are generally optimistic that the sector performed well, having observed positive trade figures and production across various field crops and horticulture.
- On Wednesday, the South African Grain Information Services (SAGIS) will publish its **weekly data on South Africa's Grain and Oilseed Producer Deliveries**. We have recently started the new 2026-27 marketing year, and the harvest for this new year is still in its early stages. In the first five weeks of the new marketing year, the farmers delivered 1.3 million tonnes of maize to commercial silos. This season is running slightly behind last season's pace. Deliveries are 17% behind what was delivered to commercial silos this time last year. The delays in the start of the season and the longer rainfall period are among the key reasons for this. Still, South Africa is poised to have an ample maize crop. South Africa's 2025-26 maize production estimate is 17.1 million tonnes, up 2% from last season, and the largest harvest on record. The 2025-26 production season corresponds with the 2026-27 marketing year. The large harvest is on the back of increased area plantings and expected high yields.
- The 2026-27 soybean marketing year soybean harvest is towards completion. The first 13-week deliveries were 2.2 million tonnes, a record, out of an estimated crop of 2.9 million tonnes. For sunflower seeds, the first 13 weeks of producer deliveries in the new 2026-27 marketing year totalled 640,775 tonnes. There is still a long way to go, as the forecast harvest for the season is 877,680 tonnes.
- South Africa's 2025-26 winter wheat harvest is complete. Some farmers continue to deliver the small volumes of the crop to commercial silos. In the first 35 weeks of this 2025-26 marketing year, farmers have delivered about 1.83 million tonnes of wheat to commercial silos. This is 97% of the expected season harvest of 1.89 million tonnes (down 2% y/y).
- SAGIS will also publish its weekly **South Africa's Grains and Oilseeds Trade data** only on Thursday. Last week, South Africa exported 127,182 tonnes of maize, with about 88% going to Vietnam. The rest went to the neighbouring countries. In the 2026-27 marketing year, we recently started, in May 2026, South Africa could export roughly 3 million tonnes of maize. This would be up from 2 million tonnes in the past season. South Africa has ample maize supplies on the back of robust production. South Africa's maize exports so far in the 2026-27 marketing year total 216,348 tonnes, out of the expected 3.0 million tonnes.
- South Africa is a net wheat importer, and May 29 marked the 35th week of the new 2025-26 marketing year. Cumulative imports to date total 1.2 million tonnes from Germany, the United States, Latvia, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Romania, Lithuania, Russia, and Poland. We expect South Africa's 2025-26 wheat imports to reach 1.85 million tonnes, roughly the same as the 2024-25 marketing year.