

Minister John Steenhuisen to fresh produce industry:

# “We can achieve great things together”

Data management platform AgrigateOne's Tech Day this week was opened by South Africa's agriculture minister John Steenhuisen, live from Parliament where the department's budget report was presented.



*Minister for Agriculture John Steenhuisen addresses the AgrigateOne Tech day, whose founder and CEO Greg Whitaker is at top right (photo: Andrew Leonsins)*

His appointment has revived the mood within commercial agriculture and with it, expectations that certain matters that have long been dragging, could be put to bed, such as the opening of the USA market

(<https://www.freshplaza.com/africa/article/2196561/watershed-moment-for-sa-citrus-full-entry-into-the-usa/>) to citrus grown in all provinces of South Africa.

Six years later, and the rule to set it in motion has become stuck in a quagmire of tit-for-tat trade quibbling. "There is a lot more we could be doing to expand on our international relationships," Minister Steenhuisen told attendees, one of whom

later noted that the Minister had already spoken to US Secretary for Agriculture Thomas Vilsack within the first hundred days of his term, something to which his predecessor never came round during her tenure despite allegedly being repeatedly approached.

"We do need access for the rest of South Africa to the United States, it's the future for our mandarins," Justin Chadwick of the Citrus Growers' Association added during his address.

Minister Steenhuisen wants to break down the silos within the agricultural industry and build partnerships amongst all, from small-scale farmers to those producing on a large scale for exports.

### **Widespread hunger side-by-side with massive food waste**

The need is urgent: reports released this week to commemorate world food security pointed out South Africa's slipping ranking. The rate of stunted child development is highly alarming, and Minister Steenhuisen referred to the impact of malnutrition on, among others, academic performance and productivity.

Paradoxically, South African farms produce a bounty but, the minister stated, "roughly a third of all food produced in South Africa ends up in a waste situation."

He remarked that given the stark figures of people not getting a minimum amount of daily calories, "we need to be far more innovative with how we deal with food waste".

The quick adoption of innovative technology, such as offered by AgrigateOne, within the South African commercial agricultural sector was lauded by Steenhuisen, but he noted that "far too many regulations are outdated, with some dating back to the 1940s and have not kept up to date with the sector itself."

Many attendees would at this point involuntarily think of the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Seeds and Remedies Act 36 of 1947. For this reason, he said, the second focus was on providing a nimble regulatory environment. Some in the industry are calling for an amendment to the Genetically Modified Organisms Act to exempt gene editing from the current broad definition.

The division of the department into a section solely focused on agriculture, while the portfolios of rural development and land reform now reside with Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso. It is interesting to note that two opposition politicians now occupy these positions.

Minister Steenhuisen remarked that he had asked for the agriculture portfolio

because he sees it as the engine room for economic growth and employment creation in South Africa. "If we do not [create economic growth and more jobs], every other metric in South Africa will go in wrong direction," he cautioned. "We can achieve great things together."

Publication date: Fri 18 Oct 2024

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