South Africa awaits clarity on AGOA membership

By Fred Meintjes | 2 November 2026



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South Africa has been participating in the AGOA act since the early 2000s, but following years of debate the country may lose that benefit when the US government announces its final decision on the matter today (2 November).

Under the act, countries in Africa enjoy tariff-free access to the US to help boost their economies.

For South Africa there is much at stake, particularly in the manufacturing sector. This includes many companies who have produced products under the act for exports to the US, with trade unions saying that hundreds of thousands of jobs could be at stake.

In the fruit sector, exporters have said they have made peace with the fact that South Africa will not be part of AGOA anymore.

Sources explained it will obviously represent a setback if fruit exports lose their tariff-free status, but last year's new tariff from the Trump administration had already fixed the tariff rate at 12 per cent.



AGOA extension offers little relief for South African fruit exporters

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South African oranges are exempted from tariffs if imported to the US, but this only applies to fruit grown in the Western and Northern Cape, which are considered virus-free areas.

The South African citrus industry has been arguing that mandarins grown in these areas should also be exempt from tariffs.

Mandarins form a huge part of the successful South African citrus programme in the US.

In recent years, South African table grape exporters have been building strong export programmes in the US.

This was disrupted last year with the first 30 per cent Trump tariffs, but exporters have said they are ready to rebuilt this year.

"The change in import rates applicably to South American exporters has levelled the playing field," noted Anton Viljoen, prominent Hex River Valley grape grower and exporter.

"We are now on the same level and we can compete effectively," he added. "We have built strong relationships, and our partners have faith in our ability to deliver according to fixed programmes."