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Agriculture boasts Q2 trade surplus of $2.14bn

28TH OCTOBER 2026 BY: MARLENY ARNOLDI - ONLINE NEWS EDITOR



South African agriculture recorded a trade surplus of $2.14-billion in the second quarter of the year, marking an 11.6% year-on-year improvement.

Agriculture South Africa (Agri SA) and Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz) find in their latest quarterly agriculture trade report that total agriculture exports reached $4.12-billion, which was a 9.1% year-on-year increase, while imports increased by 6.4% year-on-year to $1.98-billion.

Horticulture remained the backbone of the quarter's export economy, accounting for 51.3% of agricultural exports as the citrus season opened and lemon exports increased substantially.

Strong performances were also recorded in maize, raw cane sugar, sheep meat and tobacco, while livestock recorded the largest proportionate movement of any sector, expanding 27.9% quarter-on-quarter as the red meat industry navigates market access.

At the same time, structural challenges remain. South Africa is experiencing the most extensive Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak in its recorded history, which continues to keep key markets, including China, closed to South African red meat.

Exports to the US declined by 28% in the quarter under review, partly because shipments were brought forward into the first quarter ahead of tariff changes, and exports to the United Arab Emirates decreased by 26%. Africa and Europe together still account for 70.7% of total exports, highlighting the need for continued diversification and market access efforts.

"The second-quarter results show an industry that is adapting to a difficult global trading environment. Exporters are finding new markets even as traditional destinations become more challenging, but those gains will only hold if we resolve the constraints within our control, particularly FMD, port and rail performance, and phytosanitary market access," says Agri SA CEO **Johann Kotzé**.

Agbiz researcher **Charmaine ka Makhaya** adds that while established markets provide relative stability for South Africa's agricultural exports, emerging opportunities in Asia and the Middle East highlight the importance of market diversification and export expansion.

"Sustaining export growth will depend on improving market access, addressing trade barriers and strengthening South Africa's competitiveness in international markets," she states.

For Agbiz fruit manager **Wolfe Braude**, port logistics inefficiencies remain an issue, especially as citrus exports ramp up and pome fruit (apple and pear) exports are still underway.

The quarterly report further highlights positive developments in export diversification and market access.

Compared with the same quarter last year, agriculture exports to Vietnam increased by 153% year-on- year, Saudi Arabia by 90% and China by 30%, supported by zero-tariff access for African agricultural exports into China from May 1.

The extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act to the end of 2028 also provides near-term certainty, although South Africa's continued eligibility remains subject to the yearly US review.

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