

Agriculture Minister enjoys rare exposure to fruit industry

By [Konanani Liphadzi](#)

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Preceding his Service Delivery Forum at Erinvale Golf Estate in Somerset West, the Minister and his delegation - hosted by Fruit SA - visited a packhouse at the Two-A-Day farm in Grabouw, where they observed first-hand the packing process of apples. Here, Minister Zokwana was particularly heartened by the quality housing of farmworkers, as well as childcare facilities for their children.



Image via [Fruit South Africa](#)

Partnerships that count

The Minister's visit was hardly a mere meet-and-greet. The fresh fruit industry understands the power of meaningful partnerships, therefore, hosting the Minister for his quarterly Service Delivery Forum was a significant step towards connecting meaningfully with the government.

Fruit SA is the umbrella body representing the interests of the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) of southern Africa, Hortgro, Subtrop, the South African Table Grape Industry (SATI) and the Fresh Produce Exporters' Forum (FPEF).

At a time when bemoaning the micro –and macroeconomic challenges in the agricultural sector seems warranted, the R44 bn fresh fruit industry has its antennae piqued for growth opportunities. Hosting the Minister is a case in point. This historic event aligns perfectly with the industry's agenda driven by a need for strengthened partnerships with government, increased market access and real transformation.

Achieving these translates into sustaining the much-needed jobs of 200,000 South Africans employed directly within the industry, with 109,000 employed through downstream services and 8,000 through direct services rendered. This Minister's Service Delivery Forum also presented opportunities for role players in the fresh fruit industry to connect with their counterparts within the agricultural sector.

Accountability

Once the forum was underway, Minister Zokwana discussed with the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, practical means to ensure that the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) delivers on its commitments through meaningful collaboration. Ranking high on the agenda were a sectoral progress report on job creation, poverty

alleviation and contribution to gross domestic product (GDP). The department also gave an update on the policy legislative framework, economic opportunities and new catalysts for increased trade.

We can still overcome the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality as government, working together with the private sector, says Minister Zokwana.

As for the contentious topic of land reform, the Minister gave his assurance that the government won't allow any land grabs and that the parliamentary process underway is meant to fast-track land reform in an orderly manner.

The Minister also made special reference at the forum to the significance of the robust debate during the summit on farm killings, murders and stock theft held in June 2018.

He then went on to reiterate Stats SA's confirmation of the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry having plummeted to one of the largest negative GDP contributors in the second quarter of 2018, due to a significant drop in the production of field crops and horticultural products.

Farmer register

Regarding a proper farmer register, which has sparked considerable dialogue within the sector, Minister Zokwana underscored that this is in response to growing concern from the industry around misrepresented and outdated statistics of farmers across the country.

"It is my pleasure to inform you that the DAFF and Stats SA have therefore come up with a combined project of developing statistics on commercial and non-commercial farmers. The two-phase project will consist of the first phase, which is the Census of Commercial Agriculture (CoCA) covering commercial farmers; and the second phase, the Producer/Farmer Register (PFR) covering the smallholder or small scale farmers."

Market access

Market access – a strong catalyst for exports – is an arena where constant support from government is critical to galvanise trade agreements with relevant countries. "South African agricultural exports have been growing steadily in the past five years besides the advent of drought, and diseases like foot-and-mouth, avian flu and swine flu over the same period. The results can be attributed to the collaborative work between DAFF attachés, plant health, animal health, international trade directorates, as well as industry bodies."

The Minister's signing of a MoU and protocols with BRICS member countries have already produced exponential growth in exports.

During the forum Mike Mlangana, DAFF Director-General, gave feedback on issues emanating from the previous Service Delivery Forum that have been receiving the urgent attention of the department, including safety and security on farms; the

challenges pertaining to the EU's new import requirements around false codling moth (FCM); as well as mitigation measures around armyworm.

In attendance were Agriculture MECs (Limpopo and North West Provinces); the Director-General; Statistician-General; heads of departments; farmers' unions; academics; civil society; business leaders; NGO representatives; and leaders from banking institutions.

Recovery in production

Justin Chadwick, Fruit SA Vice-Chairman, lauded a significant increase in the industry's production. But he lamented the headwinds of trade barriers like protectionism, particularly in the form of tariffs. Chadwick also underscored the importance of public-private partnerships, without which increased inclusivity in this capital- and technology-intensive industry cannot be achieved.

The fresh fruit industry – and agriculture at large – holds great potential for increased job creation. But, in the absence of meaningful collaboration with government, this remains a pipedream. Therefore, we are buoyed to have had the opportunity to grant the Minister exposure to our industry, for the first time.

For us, this goes beyond smiles and handshakes. It's about harnessing support from government to expand our export footprint and, consequently, empowering thousands of South Africans to keep putting food on their tables: growing our economy one household at a time.

ABOUT KONANANI LIPHADZI

Dr Konanani Liphadzi is the CEO of Fruit SA, a non-profit organisation that represents the voice of SA's fresh fruit industry.

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