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Biosecurity and strategic investment: The missing link in Budget 2026

AgriSA notes the 2026 National Budget by Enoch Godongwana and welcomes government's commitment to fiscal consolidation and infrastructure reform.

However, while the budget advances fiscal stabilisation, it falls short in one critical area: targeted strategic investment to strengthen agricultural competitiveness and biosecurity. Agriculture remains one of the few sectors that consistently delivers export growth and foreign exchange earnings, supports rural employment and income stability, stimulates downstream agro-processing activity, and strengthens national food security resilience.

South Africa is the world's second-largest citrus exporter, with expanding global market access in avocados, maize, livestock, grapes and wine. The agricultural sector is central to economic growth and fiscal recovery, but growth cannot be sustained without strategic reinforcement.

Recent outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) have exposed systemic weaknesses in animal health systems.

The budget outlines several important initiatives to strengthen research, biosecurity, and market access. AgriSA welcomes these commitments. However, the test lies in execution speed, impact, and coordination capacity, and whether funding levels are sufficient to restore export confidence and prevent recurring outbreaks.

While the budget acknowledges biosecurity risk, it does not yet provide sufficiently clear, ring-fenced and measurable funding commitments to address immediate outbreaks, rebuild state veterinary capacity, modernise disease surveillance systems, strengthen vaccine procurement and distribution, enhance movement control enforcement, or establish structured public-private biosecurity partnerships.

While no additional increases to the Health Promotion Levy were announced, the sector remains under significant pressure, for among other reasons the challenges facing Tongaat Hulett. Thousands of rural jobs depend on sugar production and milling. Stabilising this sector requires coordinated trade, industrial and fiscal alignment.

However, infrastructure spending alone will not unlock agricultural expansion without functional biosecurity systems, regulatory certainty, efficient logistics corridors, and competitive input and compliance environments. Roads, rail and port performance remain critical enablers of agricultural competitiveness and export growth. AgriSA, together with Agbiz, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to strengthen cooperation on road infrastructure. Fiscal discipline creates space, but strategic investment determines growth.

To unlock its full multiplier effect, biosecurity systems must be strengthened, vulnerable value chains stabilised, and implementation capacity accelerated. Without this, fiscal stability will not translate into sustained agricultural expansion.

The allocation of R274.6 billion for peace and security initiatives, of which R140.0 billion has been earmarked for the police service, is welcomed.

AgriSA remains committed to a sustainable agricultural sector and will continue to engage all national stakeholders in advancing the sector.

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