Press release

8 June 2026

South African agriculture records highest first-quarter trade surplus in history

South Africa's agricultural sector recorded a trade surplus of US$1.55 billion in the first quarter of 2026. This is the highest first-quarter surplus in South Africa's agricultural trade history and represents a 16.1% improvement on the same period last year, according to AgriSA's latest Quarterly Trade Report. The report analyses agricultural and agro-processed products classified under Harmonised System (HS) Chapters 1–24, consistent with AgriSA's annual trade reporting methodology.

Total agricultural exports reached US$3.30 billion, broadly in line with Q1 2025 levels, while imports declined by 10.6% to US$1.76 billion, contributing to the improved trade balance. While the record surplus is encouraging, the report notes that it was achieved primarily through lower import costs rather than export expansion, highlighting the importance of maintaining momentum in export growth and market development.

The report highlights the continued strength of South Africa's horticultural sector, which accounted for 55% of all agricultural exports during the quarter, reinforcing its role as the backbone of South Africa's agricultural export economy. Strong performances were recorded in grapes, apples, pears, wine, citrus, berries, and tree nuts.

Horticulture remained the largest contributor to South Africa's agricultural export performance, underscoring the sector's importance for foreign exchange earnings, employment, and market diversification.

At the same time, structural challenges remain. Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) continues to constrain livestock exports, particularly into high-value Middle Eastern and Asian markets, while exports to the United States declined by 39.9% during the quarter. The report also notes increasing export concentration in a limited number of markets and subsectors, highlighting the need for continued diversification and market access efforts.

"The results confirm the resilience and competitiveness of South African agriculture in a complex global trading environment. While the record trade surplus is positive, it also highlights the importance of strengthening export growth, safeguarding market access, and resolving biosecurity challenges such as FMD," says AgriSA CEO Johann Kotzé.

"Long-term success will depend on our ability to diversify export destinations, maintain trusted trading relationships, and create an enabling environment for producers to remain globally competitive."
The report further highlights positive developments in export diversification and market access, including expanded opportunities in Asia and the Middle East, as South Africa continues to position itself as a reliable supplier of high-quality agricultural products to global markets.

Press release

Key Q1 2026 indicators
- Agricultural exports: US$3.30 billion
- Agricultural imports: US$1.76 billion
- Agricultural trade surplus: US$1.55 billion (record Q1 level)
- Horticulture share of exports: 55%
- Five-year growth in Q1 trade surplus: 86%

Download the full report: AgriSA Quarterly Trade Report, Q1 2026.

Report methodology
- Source: AgriSA Quarterly Trade Report, Q1 2026.
- Underlying trade data sourced from the South African Revenue Service (SARS) customs database and analysed via the AgricultureSA.io platform.
- The report covers agricultural and agro-processed products classified under Harmonised System (HS) Chapters 1–24. Therefore, products such as wool, cotton, forestry products, hides and skins are excluded from the analysis. Consequently, aggregate export values may differ from other agricultural trade publications that apply broader product definitions.
- All values are reported in United States Dollars (USD).

Enquiries
Johann Kotzé, AgriSA CEO
+27 (0) 79 523 5767
info@agrisa.org.za