

Press release: 15 October 2025

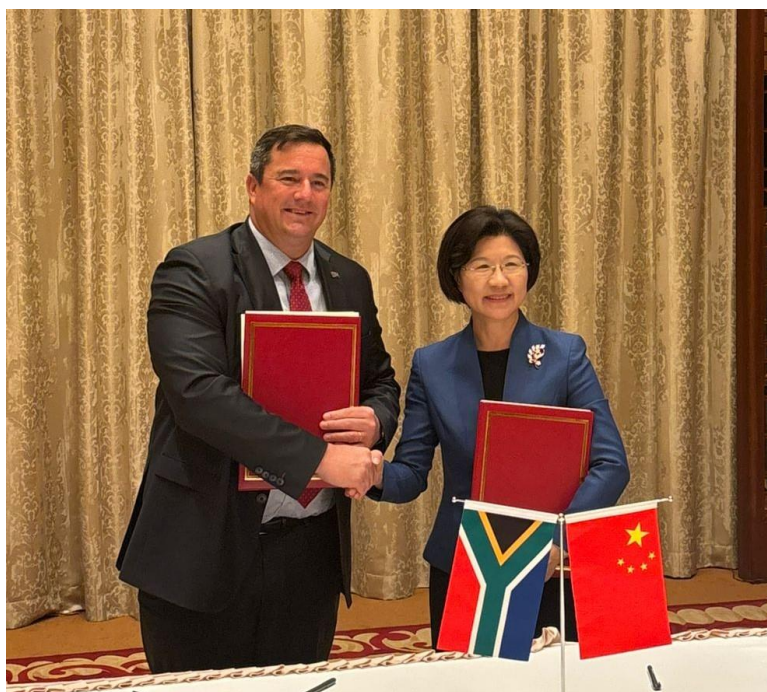
SA Stone Fruit on its way to Chinese consumers

Hortgro, the governing body of the South African Deciduous Fruit Industry, is pleased to announce that market access has been granted for five types of South African stone fruit to China. This means Chinese consumers will soon be able to enjoy delicious peaches, nectarines, plums, apricots, and prunes, as the current South African stone fruit season has just begun.

Another positive development is that the process for access for South African cherries is expected to commence in November this year, with a virtual inspection.

The **National Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen**, and his counterpart, **Minister Sun Meijun** of China's General Administration of Customs (GACC), signed the historic stone fruit trade protocol in Shanghai, China, on 15 October 2025 (pictured). It is also the first occasion on which China has negotiated access to multiple fruit types from a single country under a single agreement.

Minister Steenhuisen said in a press release issued by the Department of Agriculture (DoA) that the protocol



Directors: NDV Dicey (Chairman) - AG Petersen – CVDM Du Toit – CG Herbst – U Speirs
A Rabe (Executive Director)

represents “a major breakthrough for South African fruit producers and exporters at a time when diversification is essential for our agricultural resilience.”

“This protocol is part of a broader strategy to make South African agriculture less dependent on traditional buyers and more responsive to new consumption patterns, such as China’s growing middle class, which is driving demand for high-quality agricultural products,” he said.

He added that although markets have grown and developed over time, the access that this protocol will unlock in a vast new market such as China holds great potential and will offset some of the immediate impact of the US tariffs, especially on plums.

The opening of the Chinese market could generate approximately R393 million for us over the next five years, a figure expected to double within ten years. Exports to China are already forecasted to generate from R27 million in 2025 to R53 million in 2026. China’s peach and plum imports continue to grow rapidly; last year, they totalled more than 21 million cartons of peaches and nectarines and 20 million cartons of plums, surpassing South Africa’s entire seasonal export volume. Conservative projections suggest that exports to China could reach 5% of total export volumes by 2032/2033.

Furthermore, opening the Chinese market would enable South African producers to export more of their harvests at higher prices. Stronger prices in China, combined with a slight decline in exports to other markets, are expected to stimulate market growth. Over time, these better prices and increased volumes could encourage additional investment at farm level, particularly the establishment of new orchards. Over the next decade, this protocol could establish a market that supports approximately 350 new direct jobs on farms and in packhouses, as well as nearly 600 new jobs overall when linked industries, such as transportation and packaging, are considered.

Minister Steenhuisen was joined by industry representatives from **Hortgro**, the **Fresh Produce Exporters’ Forum** and **BerriesZA** to finalise the agreement. “We are absolutely ecstatic that we have finally concluded this process that started many years ago,” **Jacques du Preez, Hortgro General Manager: Trade and Markets**, said.

South African apples gained entry to the Chinese market ten years ago, and the pear protocol was signed in 2021, following approval by the Chinese Minister of the General Administration of Customs (GACC).

“We would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, and his department's officials, who worked tirelessly to make this possible. We also want to acknowledge the behind-the-scenes hard work by industry scientists, the **Hortgro Market Access Team, Dr Mono Mashaba**, and other specialists.

“We look forward to establishing much closer, mutually beneficial working relationships with the Chinese authorities to expedite market access between the two countries in shorter timeframes in future. We can't wait to ship our first container of delicious, ethically produced stone fruit that complies with the strictest food safety standards to China. We see the Chinese market as vital to the sustainability and further growth of our deciduous fruit industry. We have experienced tremendous growth in exports to other Eastern nations, and now we are eager to supply Chinese consumers with our delicious stone fruit as well,” Du Preez said. Orchards and packhouses have been provisionally registered with DoA in anticipation of gaining market access, so South African growers and exporters are more than ready to serve the Chinese market.

Over the past few years, the South African apple and pear industry has launched several successful consumer education and awareness campaigns for apples and pears in China. The stone fruit industry will build on these campaigns and hopefully increase exports, establishing SA as the preferred supplier of top-quality fruit in this vast market.

Hortgro's Executive Director, Anton Rabe, stated that gaining new markets while maintaining existing market access is a top priority for Hortgro. “We have a multi-disciplinary team of experts addressing the growing demands and compliance issues. Most of this work remains unseen and occurs behind the scenes. When we achieve tangible results, such as signing a new protocol for a product – in this case, stone fruit – with China, we have grounds for celebration and a reason to thank all

those, both in the public and private sectors, who have worked tirelessly to reach this goal.

Building a market of this kind is not a silver bullet that guarantees large volumes will be exported overnight, nor is it the conclusion of the journey. Now, the real challenge begins: developing this market in partnership with commercial stakeholders by maximising its potential for meaningful volumes to China, Rabe said.

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For more information, contact: info@hortgro.co.za



Congratulations to Team SA in China. From left: Billy Makhafola, Jan-Hendrik Venter, Molatelo Mamadi, Minister John Steenhuisen, Jacques du Preez, Washiela Williams, Cathy Liu, Jana le Roux and Dr Mono Mashaba at the back.