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MEDIA STATEMENT **15 October 2025**

MINISTER STEENHUISEN SIGNS LANDMARK STONE FRUIT TRADE PROTOCOL WITH CHINA

Today, the Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, and his counterpart, Minister Sun Meijun of China's General Administration of Customs (GACC), signed a historic stone fruit trade protocol in Shanghai, China.

The agreement opens the Chinese market for the first time to five types of South African stone fruit, namely apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums, and prunes. It is also the first instance where China has negotiated access for multiple stone fruit types from a single country under one deal.

Minister Steenhuisen said the protocol marks "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 while markets are 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 off-set some of the immediate impact of the US tariffs especially on plums.

The opening of the Chinese market could unlock approximately R400 million for us over the next five years, a figure which is projected to double over the next ten years. We are of the view that the inaugural 2025/26 export season can generate approximately R28 million and R54 million in 2026/27.

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 which exceeds South Africa’s entire seasonal export volume. Projections indicate that exports to China are set to grow to 5% of total export volumes in 2032/2033.

Additionally, the opening the Chinese market would allow South African producers to export more of their harvests at more sustainable prices. Stronger demand in China, together with a slight reduction in exports to other markets, are expected to drive market growth. Over time, this improved demand and increased volumes could encourage further investment at farm level, particularly the establishment of new orchards. Over the next decade, this protocol could create a market that will support roughly 350 new direct jobs on farms and in packhouses, and close to 600 new jobs overall once linked industries such as transport and packaging are included.

During his discussions with Minister Sun, Minister Steenhuisen also addressed the resumption of beef trade from certain South African regions and our progress regarding foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) regionalisation. Minister Steenhuisen has also invited a GACC technical team to visit South Africa to inspect our cherry and blueberries orchards and packhouses during the current harvest period. If the inspection proceeds smoothly, South Africa will likely secure cherry market access to China within the next harvest cycle, strengthen its trade ties, and unlock new export and job opportunities for the fruit sector. This will also consolidate our positive momentum on broader fruit trade cooperation.

The tangible results of Chinese investment can already be seen in the upgrading of South Africa’s railways, ports, and highways, improving market access for farmers and boosting logistics efficiency. This work aligns with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which prioritises infrastructure investment across Africa. The Minister also encouraged trading partners to make use of the world-class Shanghai Freight Services network to leverage its extensive global logistics network for both sea and air freight, ensuring faster and more reliable delivery of South African agricultural exports to China.

“China has been South Africa’s largest trading partner for more than a decade, and our bilateral trade continues to deepen,” Minister Steenhuisen said. “We value China’s ongoing cooperation and the shared commitment to exploring opportunities within our agriculture sector and we look forward to building on this partnership through future agreements that benefit both our countries.”

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