

13 April 2026

Dear AGBIZ Member

## South Africa and China Sign Supplementary Phytosanitary Agreement for Citrus Exports

On 10 April 2026, South Africa and China formalised the signing of a supplementary phytosanitary agreement governing the export of South African citrus fruits to China. The event was attended by Chinese Ambassador to South Africa Wu Peng, Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen, citrus industry representatives, and broader agricultural stakeholders, including CGA Vice-Chair Mr Hannes de Waal.

### Strategic milestone in bilateral cooperation

Mr Hannes de Waal described the agreement as a significant milestone in the ongoing partnership between South Africa and China. He noted that the updated protocols represent a strategic step forward, supporting South Africa's access to the Chinese market while enabling China to benefit from the counter-seasonal supply of high-quality citrus fruit.

The agreement builds on the original citrus protocol signed on 29 June 2004 and reflects continued scientific and technical collaboration between the two countries. The amended protocol introduces additional treatment options aimed at improving fruit quality on arrival, reducing supply chain costs, and enhancing competitiveness in the Chinese market.

### Economic importance of the citrus industry

The citrus industry remains a cornerstone of South Africa's agricultural sector and national economy. Export revenues exceed US\$2 billion annually, while the industry supports approximately 140,000 direct jobs at farm and packhouse level, with further employment across the value chain, including logistics and export services.

The sector operates in a highly competitive global environment, with a strong focus on cost-effective production, high-quality supply, and strong biosecurity systems.

### **China as a key growth market**

China continues to be a strategic growth market for South African agricultural exports. Exports to China and Hong Kong accounted for approximately 11.5 million cartons in 2025, representing about 6% of South Africa's total citrus exports, compared to higher levels in previous years. Industry stakeholders have indicated an intention to increase this share over time.

Ambassador Wu Peng noted that strong consumer demand in China, combined with the quality of South African citrus, presents opportunities for further expansion. He added that South African citrus complements China's domestic production and contributes to the diversity of its fruit basket.

### **Trade environment and policy developments**

The signing takes place ahead of China's 1 May announcement extending zero-tariff measures to 53 African countries with which it maintains diplomatic relations. These measures, together with facilitation initiatives such as the upgrading of "green channels," are expected to enhance market access conditions for South African agricultural products.

Minister Steenhuisen welcomed the amendment of cold treatment requirements regulating citrus exports to China and acknowledged the role of Ambassador Wu in strengthening bilateral trade relations.

He further noted that South Africa and China have concluded several agricultural agreements in recent years, including veterinary health certificates and protocols for additional product exports, contributing to expanded market access. These include agreements relating to dairy and wool protocols, as well as the export of South African avocados to China among others.

### **Strengthening collaboration**

Both government and industry stakeholders emphasised the importance of continued cooperation, scientific engagement, and technical alignment to support trade growth. Research conducted by Citrus Research International remains central to ensuring compliance with phytosanitary standards and supporting protocol development.

The agreement is expected to strengthen trade resilience amid ongoing global shipping disruptions, including those linked to geopolitical tensions, and to reinforce long-term agricultural cooperation between South Africa and China.

By Charmaine Kamakhaya, Agbiz