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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**Absa and AGDA Host Ministerial Stakeholder Dialogue
to Accelerate Agricultural Growth**

Absa, in collaboration with the Agricultural Development Agency (AGDA), hosted a prestigious Ministerial Stakeholder Dialogue on Monday, 14 October 2024, at the Maslow Hotel in Pretoria. The event convened key stakeholders from across the agricultural value chain, including senior government officials, policymakers, agribusiness executives, financial services leaders, and commercial farmers.

With the theme “Cultivating public-private partnerships for accelerated and sustainable agricultural growth,” the high-level dialogue aimed to foster strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors. The event served as a platform for discussion, collaboration, and actionable ideas to drive sustainable growth in South Africa’s agriculture sector.

Agriculture minister John Steenhuisen’s call for action

South Africa’s Agriculture Minister, John Steenhuisen, delivered a keynote address reflecting the sense of renewal brought by the newly formed government of national unity.

“We have a new spring in our step now in South Africa,” Steenhuisen remarked. “Even *The Economist* has said there is a 'lekker vibe' in the country. Now, it’s time to turn that vibe into action—driving real reforms that create jobs and grow our economy.”

The Minister identified job creation and economic growth as top priorities for the government. He highlighted the importance of partnerships to move the agricultural sector forward and emphasised the Department of Agriculture’s role as a nexus for partnership creation across the value chain.

Steenhuisen also stressed the need for modern legislative and regulatory frameworks to keep pace with the sector’s rapid advancements.

“For South Africa to stay competitive, we need a regulatory environment that is progressive, responsive, and allows for the adoption of new technologies essential for improving yields and addressing climate change,” he said.

Absa: The role of partnerships in sector growth

Absa's Sana Gumede, Managing Executive for Strategy and Customer Value Management, expressed enthusiasm for the wide range of stakeholders present. "It is heartening to see such a diverse audience gathered here today, united by a shared passion for the agricultural sector," she noted.

Reflecting on the progress made over 30 years of democracy, Gumede acknowledged that challenges – such as land reform, climate change, and market access – cannot be solved in isolation.

"Absa is proud to partner with AGDA in driving actionable conversations that will create a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural sector," she added.

Gumede underscored the importance of innovation, technology investment, and rethinking financial models to unlock the sector's potential. She reiterated that public-private partnerships are essential to achieve meaningful and long-term growth.

AGDA: A collective approach to overcoming challenges

Dr Mathews Phosa, Chairperson of AGDA, emphasised the need for collaboration and collective effort to address the challenges facing agriculture.

"The sector presents a beacon of hope for potential growth, but challenges such as infrastructure development, food security, and climate change must be tackled collectively," Phosa said.

He stressed that neither the government nor the private sector can solve these challenges alone. Public-private partnerships are essential for unlocking the full potential of the agricultural value chain and driving sustainable growth.

Unlocking collaborative models for development

A highlight of the event was the panel discussion moderated by Wandile Sihlobo, Chief Economist at AgBiz. The panel included prominent industry leaders, such as:

- **Leona Archary**, CEO of AGDA
- **Theo Boshoff**, CEO of AgBiz
- **AJ Mthembu**, President of AFASA
- **Johann Kotzé**, CEO of AgriSA
- **Abrie Rautenbach**, Head of Absa Agribusiness

The discussion focused on policy changes, inclusive financing models, and integrating smallholder farmers into established value chains. Panellists noted the importance of technological innovation in building collaborative models that promote both large-scale and smallholder agriculture.

A vision for the future of agriculture

The event concluded on a note of optimism, with participants committed to transforming the ideas shared into concrete actions. The Absa-AGDA Ministerial Stakeholder Dialogue marked a critical step toward forging stronger public-private partnerships that will enhance the agricultural sector's contribution to economic development, food security, and community growth.

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