



# What was the Agriculture Agenda at the 15th BRICS Summit?

BRIEF POST SUMMIT UPDATE

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## 1: Introduction

One of South Africa's agricultural strategic objectives is the expansion of export markets. And it is with this ambition that organized agriculture, through the BRICS Business Council, went into the 2023 BRICS Summit.

The Agribusiness Working Group had four broad focus areas for discussion with BRICS countries, namely (1) a need to improve fertilizer availability and use amongst BRICS countries and the broader African continent, (2) the sharing of best practices on agricultural sustainable development among BRICS countries, (3) outlining the BRICS countries' view on the arbitrary pesticide MRLs followed by some regions such the European Union and the general use of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures as barriers to trade, and (4) deepening trade and investment amongst the BRICS countries, and broader Africa.

## 2: AGM update

The BRICS Business Forum's annual general meeting (AGM) adopted all these points, carried on the Annual Report, and presented them to the political principals for consideration. These points also found broad support at the political level, illustrating the alignment of ambition between BRICS countries' political leadership and business interests on these matters.

While the conference is over and the work has been presented to the political principals, the technical work only starts from this point. This will be through the Business Councils of each BRICS member country, working directly with their governments to deliver on these broad points presented at the conference.



### **3: Path forward**

From a South African perspective, this would take the form of BRICS Business Council's Agribusiness Working Group engaging with both the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to deliver on these broad ambitions, especially the one of trade and investments, as well as the SPS measures barriers in countries that South Africa wants to deepen its trade.

The broad trade point mainly refers to lowering import tariffs in BRICS countries where South Africa wants to increase exports, which ties perfectly with the SPS matters. Ideally, this would not be a demanding task as South Africa's Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development chaired a meeting of BRICS Agricultural Ministers ahead of the 15th BRICS Summit and discussed similar matters as the ones presented by the Agribusiness Working Group of the BRICS Council.

Notably, South Africa remains a chair of the global Agribusiness Working Group until the end of the year, with commanding authority to bring all countries to the table for reflections and implementation of the objectives the Group had adopted. This will be the technical work that should happen between now and the end of the year and hopefully continue under the new chair in 2024. From a South African perspective, these points will remain a priority going into the new year as they will not be resolved overnight and require time.

The trade and SPS aspect is important because the BRICS countries collectively imported about US\$320 billion of agricultural products from the world market in 2022 (according to data from Trade Map). About 74% of the Group's agricultural imports come from China, 12% from India, 8% from Russia, 4% from Brazil and 3% from South Africa.

The key agricultural products the BRICS grouping imports are soybeans, palm oil, beef, maize, berries, wheat, cotton, poultry, pork, apricots and peaches, sorghum, rice, and sugar. These are products that are produced at scale by some BRICS countries. Yet the imports to other BRICS members typically originate from suppliers outside the grouping. This is understandable given that importers will search for competitively priced products and not necessarily from countries where they enjoy close cooperation. The lack of competitiveness has mainly been caused by higher import tariffs that BRICS countries face amongst each other compared with their competitors in this market, along with SPS matters. This is undoubtedly the case for South Africa regarding India and China.

Another noteworthy point emerging from the 15th BRICS Summit was the invitation of the Argentine Republic, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,



the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to become full members of BRICS. The membership will take effect from 1 January 2024.

If we consider the BRICS+ grouping from an agricultural perspective, the opportunities for increasing trade and investment from a South African perspective primarily lie in China, India, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We already have some form of agricultural trade with these countries. Still, the ambition for South Africa is to increase wine, fruits and beef exports, amongst other products, to these particular countries. Admittedly, deepening agricultural trade would bring challenges as trade is not a one-way approach. Still, we believe that South African agricultural products are of high quality, and with the lowering of tariffs and non-tariff barriers, could remain competitive prices.

### **3: Concluding remarks**

The task now lies on the BRICS Agribusiness Working Group to resume its work and engage with relevant government departments domestically and other agribusiness Working Group chairs from the founding BRICS member countries to take the points mentioned above forward. From early next year, when other BRICS+ members officially join, the BRICS Business Council's Agribusiness Working will extend an invitation to them and update them on the work of the 15th Summit. Overall, we view this Summit as broadly positive for agriculture, which also was robustly spotlighted in this conference at the plenary session of the Business Forum, with all the points we highlight here presented.

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