

## Why the AAMP is vital to SA's agricultural growth

- What began as a promising path to boosting inclusive growth in South Africa's agriculture has become mired in unending discussions, and the implementation effort has been hazy at best. In May 2022, the then Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Ms Thoko Dididza, launched South Africa's Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP), co-created by government, organized agriculture, labour, and other stakeholders. The document outlined the key constraints on South Africa's agriculture and agro-processing and presented solutions. The distinct aspect was its deep focus on various commodity value chains and the mapping of commodity corridors across the country. What followed was the creation of structures that monitor implementation and processes across the various commodities.
- The AAMP is critical because, while South Africa's agriculture gross value added has more than doubled since the dawn of democracy, there is still significant potential for growth, but various inefficiencies remain, increasing transaction costs for farming businesses and constraining expansion. Fortunately, when the current Minister in the Department of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, began his term, he recognized, correctly, the value of the AAMP and continued to champion it.
- But there is now growing criticism from some sections of the farming community against the AAMP, claiming it lacks an inclusive approach. These views are incorrect, in our view. The AAMP was co-created by most agricultural stakeholders. Importantly, what remains fundamental is whether the plan addresses the sector's main constraints. We believe that the ideal path is to support its implementation and to argue for updating as implementation continues. Seeking to start a new process will not help the sector's growth ambitions.
- With that said, the implementation has not been as encouraging as many had hoped. There are pockets of progress, but not with a coordinated focus. One reason for this may be the lack of focus and consistent push from both the government and the private sector. Often, discussions of broad policies and programmes take place in Pretoria, but the actual implementation of the plans is the responsibility of provincial and local officials. Therefore, placing sufficient attention on educating and training officials on new plans and ensuring their buy-in at such levels is critical for the success of any government-led programmes. It is possible that in many provinces, the efforts of the provincial officials do not match the enthusiasm of the political leadership in Pretoria. Such disconnects may discourage farmers and agribusinesses and slow the implementation of key programs, such as the AAMP.
- For much of 2025, discussions about the AAMP were revived only after the Department of Agriculture sought to review its progress and restore stakeholder engagement. Before that, the focus nationally was primarily on geopolitical matters and on the impact of U.S. tariffs on South Africa's agriculture. While such discussions are valuable and central to the sector's growth, they need not be the dominant focus

to the extent that time is not given to long-running programmes that are critical to the sector's success. South Africa still needs to deal with animal diseases, inadequately maintained roads, inefficiencies in rail, rural crime, inefficient registration of agrochemicals, and inept municipalities, amongst other things. Many commodity-specific matters require our attention.

- Moreover, in the context of inclusive growth, the political leadership in the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development has done very little to release government-owned land with title deeds to deserving black farmers so they can participate commercially in agriculture. Against this context, it is probably fair to argue that they, too, have constrained the implementation of the AAMP.
- While it is crucial to engage with geopolitics and the search for export markets, there remain many domestic issues that also deserve attention. The AAMP carries many answers, and should be implemented.