



MINISTER
AGRICULTURE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Media Statement

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MINISTER STEENHUISEN UNLOCKS R12 BILLION INDIGENOUS ECONOMY BOOST

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, has approved the inclusion of indigenous crops and medicinal plants into the list of declared agricultural products. This decision formally recognises a high potential sector estimated to be worth about R12 billion per year to the South African economy.

The declaration of indigenous crops and medicinal plants as agricultural products was requested by one of the directly affected groups in the agricultural industry.

These newly recognised products, which were approved on 21 July 2025, will henceforth be regarded as agricultural products for purposes of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, 1996 (Act No. 47 of 1996) as amended (MAP Act). This legislation is only applicable on products which are declared as agricultural products.

Unlocking the economic potential

The National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) estimates that the combined monetary value of medicinal plants and indigenous crops in South Africa is about R12 billion per annum, representing less than 3% of the country's total agricultural production.

The total agricultural production in South Africa is approximately R450 billion per annum.

"For too long our people who harvest and trade traditional medicines and indigenous crops, have been operating in the economic shadows. With this legislative change, we are granting dignity, recognition and a path to prosperity," Minister Steenhuisen said.

He added that the department is decisive in keeping its priorities alive, like pushing for a more modernise and progressive legislative and regulatory environment.

"Outdated legislation is a hinderance to the rapid absorption of new technologies, remedies, practices and innovations—which are essential if we are to improve yield, health and profitability in the agricultural sector," the minister continued.

The monetary value for traditional medicinal plants and products trade in South Africa is estimated to be worth approximately R3 billion per year. It should be noted that most of this value does not enter the formal trade, and therefore, is an addition to the gross domestic product (GDP).

It is estimated that indigenous crops might account for about 2% of the country's total agricultural production, which means the monetary value for this produce is likely R9 billion.



Newly declared products

The original list of declared agricultural products was published in 1997 and since then, there have been several amendments to the list informed by several factors within the agricultural industry.

Indigenous crops are crops that have their origin in South Africa. Added to these crops are those that were introduced into the country and are now recognised as naturalised or traditional crops. They are divided into three categories, namely grains, fruit and vegetables. Indigenous grain crops can be defined as any crop yielding starch and protein-enriched seeds suitable for food. These crops are further subdivided into cereals (e.g., millet) and pulses (e.g., Bambara groundnut).

Indigenous fruit crops examples are marula, wild apricot, wild plum, raisin bush, sour plum.

Indigenous vegetable crops are subdivided into roots or tubers (e.g., cassava, amadumbe, marama bean and living potato) and leafy (e.g., cleome, cowpea, amaranth, blackjack and jews mallow).

While the list of the names of these crops and medicinal plants is not yet finalised, South Africa is known to have one of the richest selections of indigenous plants from which medicinal herbs can be extracted. Some of the examples include:

1. **Buchu (*Agathosma betulina*):** Buchu is an aromatic shrub native to the Western Cape region of South Africa. It has been traditionally used as a herbal remedy for urinary tract infections, stomach ailments, and as a diuretic.
2. **Hoodia (*Hoodia gordonii*):** Hoodia is a succulent plant found in the Kalahari Desert. It has been used by indigenous San people as an appetite suppressant and thirst quencher during long hunting trips. It gained global popularity as a potential weight loss aid.
3. **Sutherlandia (*Lessertia frutescens*):** Also known as “Cancer Bush” or “Balloon Pea,” Sutherlandia has a long history of use in traditional medicine for various conditions, including respiratory infections, stomach problems, and as a general immune booster.
4. **Devil’s Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*):** Devil’s Claw is a tuberous plant native to the Kalahari region. It is known for its anti-inflammatory properties and is commonly used to alleviate joint pain, arthritis, and digestive disorders.
5. **Aloe vera:** Although Aloe vera is found in various parts of the world, it is indigenous to South Africa. Its gel is widely used to soothe and heal burns, skin irritations, and wounds. It also has digestive and immune-enhancing properties.
6. **African Wormwood (*Artemisia afra*):** African Wormwood is a perennial shrub with aromatic leaves. It has been used in traditional medicine for treating fevers, colds, coughs, and as a digestive aid. It is also known for its antimicrobial properties.
7. **African Potato (*Hypoxis hemerocallidea*):** The African Potato is a perennial plant with tuberous roots. It has traditionally been used to boost the immune system and alleviate symptoms of HIV/AIDS. It is also believed to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.
8. **Hooded Pelargonium (*Pelargonium sidoides*):** Hooded Pelargonium is a species of geranium native to South Africa. Its roots are used to make a herbal remedy called Umckaloabo, which is used to treat respiratory tract infections, including bronchitis and sinusitis.

9. **Wilde Als (*Artemisia afra*):** Wilde Als, also known as “African Wormwood,” is a shrub with fragrant leaves that has been used in traditional medicine for centuries. It is believed to have anti-inflammatory properties and is used to alleviate various digestive disorders.

Legislative gateway for growth

The representative bodies of the newly declared agricultural products can, in the future, apply for statutory measures, such as levies, records and returns and registrations, as provided for in sections 15, 18 and 19 of the MAP Act. It is important to note that each application for statutory measures will still be investigated and evaluated in terms of its own merits and may be recommended to the minister for approval, provided that it meets the set criteria.

The benefit of a statutory measure is that, once it is approved by the minister, it enables the directly affected groups, among other things, to collect funds and render supporting functions to grow the relevant agricultural industries and create job opportunities.

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