

Quarterly Trade Update

Second Quarter of 2026

This publication provides a quarterly synopsis of trade-related matters in the South African agricultural sector

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INSIGHT

Q2 2026 saw South Africa's total merchandise exports rise 15% year on year, while imports grew 22%, narrowing the overall trade surplus by 35%. Since Q2 2021, imports have increased 69%, compared with 20% export growth, and the surplus has narrowed from R163 bn to R38 bn. Agriculture's quarterly net trade improved marginally from 2025, despite imports growing slightly more than exports.

Total South African trade

South Africa's Q2 exports rose from R492 bn in 2021 to R591 bn in 2026, marking a 20% increase over the 5-year period. While exports grew over this period, imports rose faster, increasing by 69% and reducing the trade surplus from R163 bn in 2021 to R38 bn in 2026. Thus, despite higher exports, South Africa's net trade position is narrower.

Compared to 2025, exports rose 15% in the second quarter of 2026, while imports rose 22%. The larger import increase reduced South Africa's net exports by 35% year on year (y-o-y). Exports were largely driven by high-value precious stones and metals. Imports, by contrast, were driven by machinery, electrical equipment, and mineral products, including refined and crude petroleum. The Middle East crisis substantially influenced the rise in imports, as average crude oil prices increased by 47% between Q2 2025 and 2026, from $61 per barrel in Q2 2025 to $90 in 2026. The crisis's knock-on effects also raised shipping, logistics, insurance, and other costs associated with moving products in international markets.

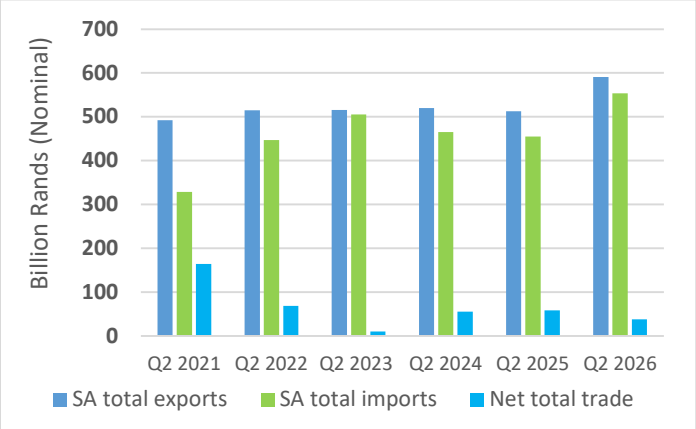


Figure 1: South Africa's total trade in the second quarter (2021 - 2026)
Source: ITC, 2026

Despite rising exports over the last few years, South Africa's trade surplus has declined as imports have grown faster. **Figure 1** shows the declining surplus, as the gap between exports and imports continues to narrow.

Trade in the South African agricultural sector

South Africa's agricultural sector[1] has grown steadily over the last few years, with exports rising from R49 bn in Q2 2021 to R74 bn in Q2 2026 (a 52% increase). In recent years, imports have grown much more slowly and have remained between R35 bn and R37 bn.

In quarter two of 2026, agricultural exports rose marginally by 3.5% while imports rose 4.2%, y-o-y. This kept net trade nearly the same as in 2025.

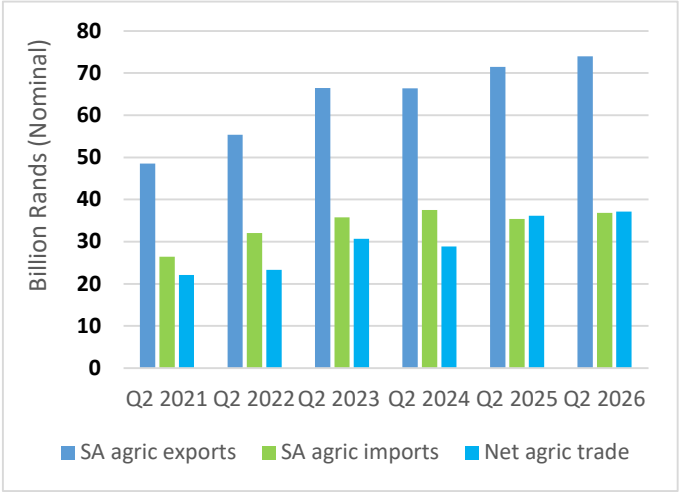


Figure 2: South Africa's 2021Q2 – 2026Q2 agricultural trade
Source: ITC, 2026

Agricultural exports are strengthening and pulling further away from COVID-19 levels each quarter. **Figure 2** illustrates that sectoral net trade is slightly higher than imports for the quarter.

Consolidation of agricultural trade with selected partners

While South Africa's total agricultural exports grew in the second quarter of 2026, imports from its key trading partners grew faster than exports. Import growth was broad across all major suppliers. All of them increased in Q2 2026, except those from 'Other Regions', which dropped by 12% (**Figure 3**).

The European Union (EU) is the largest import supplier, followed by the BRIC nations with shares of 24% and 19%, respectively.

[1] Agricultural trade is defined in terms of the Harmonised System (HS) as HS 1-24, HS 41-44, and HS 50-52

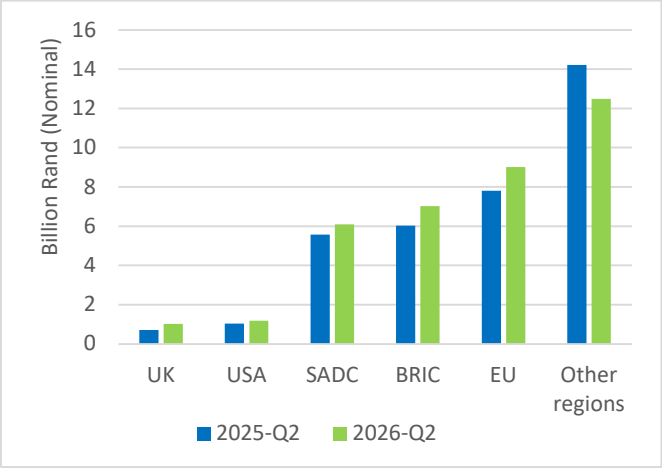


Figure 3: South Africa's agricultural imports (R37 bn) from selected partners
Source: ITC, 2026

Export growth was positive overall. Exports were largely destined for the SADC region, with the EU in second place. SADC accounted for 34% of agricultural exports. BRIC nations showed the fastest growth of 23%.

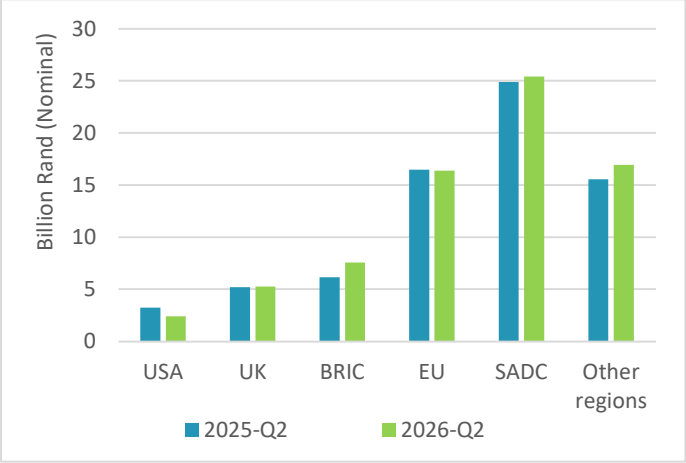


Figure 4: South Africa's agricultural exports (R74 bn) to selected partners
Source: ITC, 2026

The uncertain trading environment between South Africa and the USA was evident in Q2, with exports falling by 25% from R3.2 bn to R2.4 bn. The USA's tariffs of up to 30% above the most favoured nation (MFN) rates continue to have a negative effect. **Figure 4** shows the declining share of the USA's exports, from 5% in Q2 of 2025 to 3% in the current quarter.

Disaggregated agricultural commodity trade performance by value and growth

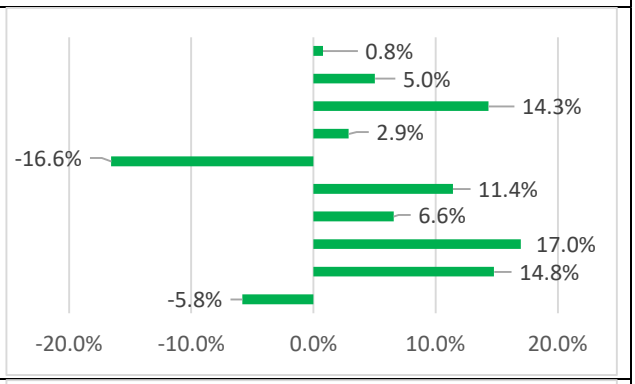
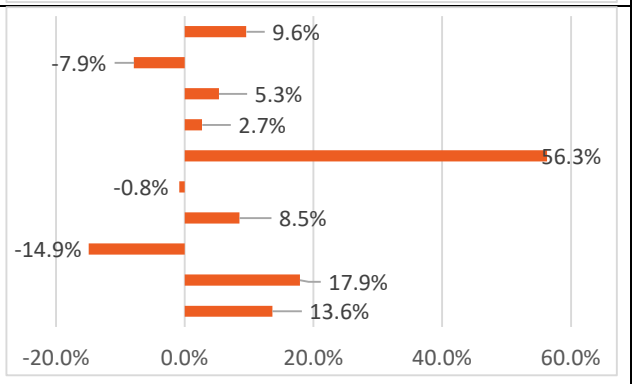
Table 1 shows the top 10 imported and exported products in the second quarter of 2026. These products represent 76% of the total agricultural export basket and 65% of the total import basket. Exports remain concentrated in edible fruits and nuts, particularly citrus, apples, and pears. This group accounted for 36% of South Africa's agricultural exports. On the other hand, despite an 8% decline, cereals are the biggest driver of imports, contributing 16% to the agricultural import basket. Rice and wheat contribute most to imports.

Another export group is processed products, such as beverages, cereals, and processed fruits and vegetables. Together, these three groups contribute about 20% of South Africa's exports, despite a 17% drop in exports of processed fruit and vegetable products. While contributing a smaller share of exports, wool and oilseeds grew the fastest in Q2 2026 compared to the same period in 2025, up 17% and 15%, respectively.
The Asian markets were important for oilseeds and grain exports. Soybean exports were destined mainly for Malaysia and Indonesia. Cereals, which rose 14%, were led by maize, which found markets in Vietnam, rising from R463 million in Q2 2025 to R1.8 billion in Q2 2026.

In the second quarter of 2026, meat imports rose 56% compared to the same period in 2025. This was driven by increased imports of pork cuts from R171 million to R516 million, as well as increased imports of frozen beef cuts from R5.6 million in Q2 2025 to R48 million in Q2 2026. Recent animal disease outbreaks in both industries may have contributed to the increase. Imports were largely targeted toward the hospitality industry.

Coffee and tea, as well as tobacco products, also showed strong import growth in the quarter. They rose 18% and 14%, respectively, while cocoa imports fell 15%.

Table 1: Value and growth of the top 10 South African agricultural trade commodities: 2025Q2 vs. 2026Q2

Trade flow	Products	Q2 2025 (Rand bn)	Q2 2026 (Rand bn)	Percentage Change
Exports	Edible fruit and nuts	26,84	27,04	
	Beverages	6,96	7,31	
	Cereals	4,43	5,06	
	Miscellaneous	3,33	3,43	
	Processed fruit & veg	4,33	3,61	
	Sugar products	2,01	2,24	
	Fish products	2,65	2,82	
	Wool	1,87	2,18	
	Oilseeds	1,94	2,22	
	Food preparations	2,05	1,93	
Imports	Animal & veg oils	3,41	3,74	
	Cereals	5,88	5,42	
	Beverages	3,02	3,18	
	Sugar products	2,99	3,07	
	Meat products	1,30	2,03	
	Miscellaneous	2,22	2,20	
	Processed fruit & veg	1,14	1,24	
	Cocoa	1,42	1,21	
	Coffee & Tea	1,02	1,62	
	Tobacco	1,15	1,31	

Overall, **Table 1** shows a strong export-oriented sector, with export value more than double that of imports. Products such as rice, wheat, and palm oil remain dominant in South Africa's import portfolio because unsuitable climatic conditions make it difficult to produce them competitively.

IN CONCLUSION

The second quarter of 2026 underscored a divergence in trade. Faster import growth relative to exports narrowed South Africa's total trade surplus. Agriculture remained a net exporter despite imports growing slightly faster than exports. Edible fruit and nuts anchored agricultural exports; cereals (rice and wheat) remained the largest import group, and meat imports rose sharply. External factors played a key role in the sectoral performance during the quarter. Agricultural exports to the US fell 25%, highlighting exposure to trade-policy shifts. Higher oil and logistics costs, together with animal-health risks, added pressure. Sustaining export competitiveness and improving future performance depend on recovery from these factors, reliable logistics, broader markets, and stronger biosecurity.

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