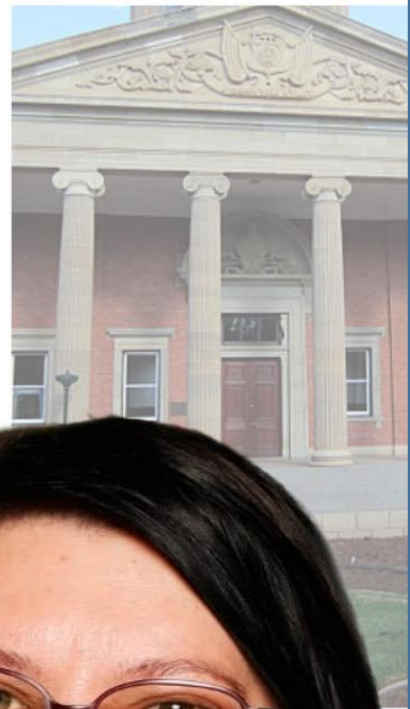


BUDGET VOTE SPEECH 2026/27



Financial Year 2026/27

Date: 23 April 2026

Time: 10h00

Venue: Thabo Thokoza
Secondary School,
Bethlehem.

VOTE 11
2026



MEC:Ms Elzabe Rockman
Agriculture, Rural Development and
Environmental Affairs

 Free State Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs

 @fsdardea

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A **FREE STATE** THAT **WORKS** FOR ALL



agriculture, rural development
and environmental affairs

Department of
Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs
FREE STATE PROVINCE



VOTE 11: AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Premier and Members of the Executive Council

Honourable Members of the Legislature

Our Local Government leadership

Traditional leaders

Director General, Heads of Departments and our support staff

Our farmers and stakeholders in the agriculture sector

Distinguished guests

We appreciate the opportunity to table the budget vote of the Department today and recognize the historical significance of the month of April in the history of the liberation of our country. The mandate of our Department in respect of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs find expression as key economic development enablers in the revised Free State Growth and Development Strategy (FSGDS).

Agriculture in South Africa is more than just an economic activity. It is a lifeline. It feeds our nation, supports millions of jobs, and sustains rural communities. It is intrinsically woven into the social, economic and moral fabric of our rural communities and economies.

Environmental Affairs is the golden thread that runs through urban and rural societies. We must achieve a balance to uphold our constitutional obligations to protect our natural resources with the need for sustainable economic growth, focusing on climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and a "green economy".



The late Thomas Sankara once said, *“He who feeds you, controls you. We must depend on our own agriculture for our sustenance and sovereignty.”* A nation that can feed itself from a broad, inclusive, commercial agricultural base, is a nation that can determine its own future. Strengthening Free State agriculture, and opening that agriculture to black farmers who have been waiting for generations for their turn, is how we strengthen South Africa's sovereignty.

Land reform remains a moral imperative and an economic necessity. It is about correcting historical injustice while expanding participation in the agricultural economy. The mandate is held by the national Department of Land Reform and Rural Development Progress has been made but substantial work remains. Since the restitution process began, 2 675 land claims have been settled in the Free State. Efforts to transfer land ownership have accelerated. In February 2026, hon. Minister Nyontsho issued 58 title deeds to beneficiaries in Bethlehem, including to 48 farmers who had leased state farms for more than a decade and 10 farm dwellers who received secure tenure.

The Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLLRD) also facilitated an engagement with 29 Communal Property Associations (CPAs) in the Free State, reflecting on governance structures, membership, regulatory compliance and the state of development and operations of land under the control of CPAs. Our Department will provide non-financial support to the initiatives of DLLRD as it begins to comprehensively address challenges in the CPA-environment. Resolving these challenges is a prerequisite for the provincial and national Departments of Agriculture consideration of financial support to CPAs.

We are working with our provincial Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to verify the suitability of provincial-owned land parcels for agricultural purposes. That work is nearing finalization but early indications are that very few provincially-owned land parcels are suitable for agricultural purposes.



AGRICULTURE SECTOR PERFORMANCE & OUTLOOK

Agriculture in the Free State matters to the entire nation. In 2025, South African agriculture did something remarkable. While manufacturing contracted and construction marked its ninth consecutive year of decline, agriculture grew by 17.4 % and added R134.8 billion to national GDP. (*Stats SA, 10 March 2026*) The sector added 30 000 jobs in the fourth quarter alone, bringing total employment to approximately 950 000 — making agriculture one of the strongest job creators in the economy. (*Stats SA, QLFS Q4 2025*).

Our Free State was at the centre of that performance. We grew 41 % of the nation's maize, 47.6 % of its sunflower, 49.1 % of its soya beans, 45.1 % of its groundnuts, and 31.4 % of its commercial sorghum. (*DoA, Trends in the Agricultural Sector, 2025*) Eighteen % of the national cattle herd grazes our veld. Twenty % of the nation's sheep flock produce 8.2 million kilograms of our wool. When the Free State performs, food prices stabilise, supply chains strengthen, and households across SA benefit.

South African agricultural exports reached record levels in Q4 2025, despite a 36 percent decline in exports to the United States on the back of new tariffs. Hon Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen has rightly noted that our diversification strategy is working: growth of 31 percent to BRICS+ countries, 21 percent to the United Kingdom, 9 percent to the European Union, and 8 percent to SADC. Cumulative tractor sales were up 7 174 units in January 2026 — a 19 percent year-on-year increase that tells us our commercial farmers are still investing in the future of the sector. The 2025/26 summer grains and oilseed season is projected to be strong.

Challenges and Opportunities

Global geopolitical tensions — the wars in Ukraine and Iran, shifting tariff regimes, supply-chain disruptions in fertiliser, fuel, and shipping — have raised input costs for our farmers.



Rising costs of fertiliser, fuel, animal feed, seed, and agrochemicals have forced producers to scale back, delay investment, or take on debt to maintain operations. These challenges are also an opportunity.

It is an opportunity to adopt precision farming, artificial intelligence, and mechanisation that can transform efficiency. An opportunity to advance climate-smart and regenerative practices that advance sustainability and unlock green financing. An opportunity to diversify into high-value crops, plant-based proteins, and agro-processing industries. An opportunity to build the policy support, targeted subsidies, and risk-management tools that stabilise the sector and empower farmers. An opportunity to expand our sustainable use of natural resources and the green economy. Every constraint is an opportunity to an innovator or a DFI to contribute meaningfully to our broader sector.

The Foot-and-Mouth Disease response

Hon. Premier reflected in the State of the Province Address on the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease and our support of the expanded, integrated national FMD control and eradication strategy. Following the declaration and classification of FMD as national disaster (*in Government Gazette No 54133*), the FS Executive Council subsequently approved the Business Plan for FMD containment measures in support of the National Disaster Classification.

Our business plan has been submitted for processing and consideration to the National Disaster Management Centre through our provincial Department of COGTA. Our Provincial Joint Operations Centre, (*bringing together stakeholders from the broader public and private sector as well as organized agriculture*) started operating in September 2025. This has strengthened cooperation and coordination between stakeholders.



The scale of our FMD battle is contextualized by the projection that we will have to vaccinate approximately 3 million cattle – that is around 18 % of the national herd.

The current state and our responsiveness to the Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreak in the Free State reflect the following;

- As at 17 April 2026, there were **443 confirmed** cases and **346 suspect cases**. A total number of 294 new cases were identified from January 2026 to 17 April 2026. Fezile Dabi and Thabo Mofutsanyana districts remain the epicentre of the FS disease outbreak. The increase in reported cases is largely attributable to improved awareness and reporting by farmers following the rollout of the mass vaccination campaign. Most cases present as historical infections.
- The disease has affected both cattle and pigs, with approximately 188 thousand 634 animals impacted. Despite the scale of the outbreak, the morbidity rate has remained relatively low at 6%, with mortality negligible at 0.0012%.
- During the reporting period (*11 July 2025 to 17 April 2026*), **353 thousand 447** animals were vaccinated with the BVI, ARC, Biogenesis and Aftodoll vaccines, bringing the cumulative total to **472 thousand 578**. We can confirm that all recorded dairies in the Free State has been vaccinated.
- In addition, **2,786** farms were inspected and **80,594** samples collected as part of surveillance efforts.
- Our progress is made possible by our small team of veterinarians and animal health technicians, assisted by veterinarians from the private sector We must appreciate the extraordinary dedication and commitment of these officials and individuals who carry the frontline burden of the fight against FMD.



- The Department has implemented a range of control measures, including quarantine enforcement, controlled movement within designated 10 km zones, targeted vaccination campaigns, intensified surveillance and monitoring as well as biosecurity initiatives.
- Unfortunately there are those who continue to move animals unlawfully, even with forged documentation, who refuse vaccinators access to herds, who fail to adhere to biosecurity measures at auctions and others who treat this national disaster as another business opportunity. Our control measures are not negotiable.

We have taken action and will continue to do so in the interests of the broader agricultural sector and our nation.

- An extensive information and awareness campaign was initiated using commercial and community print media, radio stations and pamphlets printed in 5 languages. This will continue in the new financial year.
- We will establish mobile quarantine handling facilities at 4 key points along our 485 km Lesotho border. The facilities will fall under the control of our state veterinary services. The identified points include **Monontsha** (covering up to Caledonspoor), **Pheka Bridge** (From Caledonspoor to Ficksburg), **Maseru** (Ficksburg to Ladybrand up to Hobhouse, Van Rooyen gate & Sephako) and **Makhaleng** (Wepener to Zastron). We are collaborating with multiple stakeholders (the Malachi Foundation and the UFS, SANDF, SAPS, NPA, BMA, SARS, AFASA, VS Landbou, CSRT and the 6 border municipalities) on this project. We plan to further expand mobile quarantine handling facilities, prioritizing districts at the epicentre of the outbreak.
- The Department received **R26 million** for our FMD response in 2025/26 financial year. R15 million was from the disaster response fund, while R11 million of CASP funding was re-prioritized.



- Of this, **R3.63 million** was spent during the reporting period (15 July 2025 to 31 March 2026), with total outstanding commitments amounting to **R22.27 million**. The outstanding commitments mainly relate to the BVI-vaccine that is still on back-order from December 2025 as well as delivery of other essential requirements such as ear-tags due as demand is currently exceeding supply. Eartags were, however, delivered on 15 April 2026.

We are confident that our comprehensive and innovative approach has laid a solid foundation for our FMD response, we are not complacent. Although we attempt to support safe economic activity within the livestock sector, this is significantly constrained by biosecurity requirements. We fully understand that our statistics do not reflect the enormity of the economical and psychological impact that FMD has caused to our livestock farmers, feedlots, dairies and the broader sector. Our only way forward is to continue to work together, ensure compliance with biosecurity measures and regulations and accelerate our vaccination campaign – in doing so, we will fast-track the return to positive trade conditions.

MEDIUM TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN (MTDP)

Our 2026/2027 Annual Performance Plan remains aligned to the priorities and outcome interventions of the MTDP 2024-2029. We affirm our Department's responsibilities and contributions in respect of Priority 1: Driving inclusive growth and job creation, Priority 2: Reducing Poverty and Tackling the High Cost of Living and Priority 3: Building a Capable, Ethical and Developmental State.

We furthermore acknowledge that the rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities (WYPD) must be mainstreamed across all three priorities.

The MTDP also reflects our international commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, the AU's Agenda 2063, and the SADC Regional Indicative



Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030. Our Department is required to deliver on 6 of the 17 Global Goals relating to: no poverty; zero hunger; gender equality; decent work and economic growth; reduced inequalities; and life on land.

WHAT WE DELIVERED, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

Hon Speaker, allow me to briefly reflect on the Departmental performance for the 2025/26 financial year and our commitments for 2026/2027;

PRIORITY 1: DRIVING INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND JOB CREATION

Farmer Support and Development

In 2025/26, we developed and implemented a comprehensive Provincial Farmer Register on which 8 094 farmers are now registered. CASP supported 63 projects and Ilima/Letsema supported 19 projects, with combined funding supporting 25 women-led projects and 24 youth-led projects across grains, fodder, horticulture, sunflower, soya beans, red meat, and agro-processing. Forty-six individual farmers in grains, oilseeds, and horticulture received comprehensive producer support. A further 2 218 farmers received extension advisory services.

We also invested in the disaster management capacity of farmers, Fire Protection Associations and provincial reserves with the distribution of fire-fighting equipment and facilitating fire-fighting training.

The Parys Poultry Project (part of our intervention programme) is a story worth telling. Its third chicken house was completed in the last financial year. The project is now fully operational with 40 000 broiler chickens. Not every project has moved as fast as we wanted. The Melkkraal and Kutlwanong Farmer Trust projects in Lejweleputswa could not proceed in 2025/26 due to unresolved tenure-security matters and beneficiary disputes. We appreciate Hon Minister Nyhontso's personal intervention in the Kutlwanong matter in January 2026 and his engagement with Melkkraal in February



2026. Resolving these matters is a provincial and national precondition for funding support.

Other highlights of our performance during **2025/26** include:

- 202 job opportunities were created through our LandCare programmes. Conservation Agriculture was successfully implemented at the Seotlong and Unicorn Agricultural Schools.
- The Livestock Improvement Programme with the House of Traditional Leadership continued but due to the outbreak of FMD, expenditure was redirected to livestock related activities, including investment in infrastructure and equipment. Other livestock projects were similarly affected.
- Through a strategic partnership with the University of the Free State and the **National Wool Growers' Association**, communal farmers, including youth and women, have been trained across the wool value chain, including animal production, shearing, wool classification and contamination control. We have expanded the programme's footprint between July 2025 and February 2026, to reach a total of 759 additional participants in areas such as Qwaqwa (Tsheseng and Thaba Bosiu) and Wesselsbron. The programme will be unfolding in other areas of Thabo Mofutsanyana and the Xhariep districts.

Training and Development

- Our work in strengthening **Glen College of Agriculture** is continuing and is supported by a focused programme guided by the Council of Higher Education (CHE). It focuses on curriculum review and transformation as well as policy review and development. Our partnership with the Da Vinci Institute also supports our work and focuses on, *inter alia*, governance, compliance and quality management as well as digital student lifecycle systems.



In addition, we have systematically started a programme to resuscitate farming activities on Glen Farm.

- The department has provided **skills development and training** opportunities for **1 577** farmers. (*1 131 accredited and 126 non-credit bearing training*). *Training ranged from abattoir management, veld management, beef and grain production, wire fence erection, farm management, forage pasture management and farm finance management.* In addition, **20** projects were provided with mentorship.

Agricultural Marketing Services

- We supported 3 marketing infrastructure projects in 2025/26 with sheep shearing equipment, vehicles, infrastructure and feed processing equipment. The projects are the Conjwa Shearing Services in Reddersburg and the Donkerhoek Sheep Project in Smithfield (both in Xhariep) and the LAMMJ project in Mangaung.
- 18 agri-businesses were assisted with marketing services, 3 projects were assisted with obtaining SA-GAP certificates which are essential for the fresh produce compliance system. In addition, 40 Wool farmers from Mangaung Metro Municipality participated in a wool shearing workshop whilst a grain marketing outlook workshop was also facilitated in Heilbron in the Fezile Dabi district.

Rural Development

The Free State Provincial Rural Development Indaba was facilitated as a precursor to the National Indaba that will take place during May 2026 in the Free State. The Indaba reflected on a broad-range of issues, including enhancing agricultural productivity and food security, creating non-farm employment, ensuring equitable land distribution, providing essential infrastructure and basic services, fostering sustainable community development as well as infrastructure and maintenance, bridges and access roads, dwelling and living conditions on farms and land-tenure security.



Participants affirmed their resolve to condemn farm violence and invasion, tackle stock theft especially along the Lesotho-FS border. Traditional leaders pledged to support their rural communities in benefiting and participating in economic development. This consolidates our input to the National Indaba.

Environmental Affairs

The National Waste Kgoro took place in March 2026 in Bloemfontein under the theme; “Waste infrastructure investment towards equitable, sustainable waste services and circular economy.” The Tswelopele LM received an award for the cleanest municipality in the Free State and Masilonyana LM received an award for the most improved landfill operation and management. Various other programmes such as the environmental youth empowerment programmes, landfill site audits and air quality management were implemented.

In addition, we launched the Million Tree campaign and have planted trees in, amongst others, Virginia, Ventersburg, Bloemfontein, Phillipolis, Petrusburg, Trompsburg, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu. Yesterday, we marked Earth Day with trees planted in Marquard and Bethlehem. Dihlabeng and Setsoto LMs have actively participated in this campaign and we have received support from various private sector partners.

Our **commitments for 2026/27** include the following:

- a) **Support of subsistence and emerging farmers, including commercialization of black farmers.** This will be achieved through CASP funding in support of; (i) producers in the grains, horticulture and livestock sector, including the black farmer commercialization initiative (ii) a communal livestock census programme (iii) veterinary services, including the FMD strategy and broader animal health services, the expansion of mobile quarantine handling facilities and consideration of traceability systems, (iv) the livestock improvement programme with traditional leaders and (v) support to commonages



We will continue to strengthen our verification, monitoring and evaluation and accountability processes in respect of projects we support financially. All projects recommended for funding are now verified by the national Department of Agriculture, including physical site visits, prior to approval. Deviations from funding conditions require both provincial and national approval. We acknowledge that this increased compliance focus have been challenging to some beneficiaries but it is undoubtedly in the interest of protecting government's investment in the emerging agricultural sector.

One of our priorities this financial year must be the resolution of the **disjuncture in the period of lease agreements** offered to farmers by our municipalities and the lease agreement requirements of CASP funding. Some of our recommended projects are repeatedly rejected by the national Department purely on the basis that their lease agreements are for a shorter period than that required by CASP.

- b) **Training and Capacity Development of Farmers** including the SHEP programme targeting 10 000 small scale producer farmers, Extension Services, Glen College of Agriculture and Research and Development This is why Glen College matters. It is why the AgriSETA partnership matters. It is why the 120 graduates and the 1 800 skills-development participants are not a line item but the foundation of transformation.
- c) **Land Care:** Our focus will be on agricultural land rehabilitation, the promotion of conservation agricultural practices, climate-resilient agricultural production and green jobs. We will rehabilitate 7 500 ha and employ 700 people under green jobs We will contribute to the reduction in soil erosion and improve soil health by ensuring that 202 hectares of cultivated land is under Conservation Agriculture practices.

We are still dealing with the environmental consequences and its impact on agriculture of the Jagersfontein Mine Tailings Dam disaster of 2022.



A pilot rehabilitation project will be launched in Jagersfontein covering approximately 1 ha, where soil samples have already been collected for chemical analysis. The primary challenge identified is high sodium-levels (between 50 to 80 % above normal levels) within the soil profile. This has significantly reduced grazing capacity across communal land and two commercial farms. Current efforts of the mine focus on surface scraping, but this approach has proven ineffective as the problem lies deeper in the soil. This pilot will therefore apply gypsum to ameliorate sodicity, with ongoing monitoring to inform scaling up of the intervention to affected areas.

- d) **Promotion of market access:** 18 Agri-businesses will be supported and 10 000 exports certificates will be facilitated. We invite producers interested in accessing the Agri-business Fund to work with us as we intend to support 10 agribusinesses supported with Black Economic Empowerment advisory services
- e) **Promoting inclusive rural economy and rural safety,** including implementation of the resolutions of the provincial and national Rural Development Indaba. Our focus will increasingly prioritize the socio-economic, labour-related and gender-based violence challenges faced by farm workers and farm dwellers face. We will also support key initiatives of the CSRT relating to the implementation of the Rural Safety Strategy and cross-border fora.
- f) Supporting **environmental sustainability and climate change** strategy and actions. We confirm the commitments made in SOPA in respect of the Million Tree Programme (collaborating with DFFE, municipalities and the private sector), our partnership programme with UFS in respect of the Giraffe Research project, climate change, waste management, air quality, environmental empowerment and conservation, including EIA permits as well as our flagship schools' environmental programme. We will collaborate with DWS in respect of the protection of our water resources and with DEDT in the management and operations of our reserves.



- g) Our environmental support, oversight and monitoring mandate will find expression through the environmental audit of 34 municipal waste landfill sites and conducting 280 environment compliance inspections in municipalities. We will support of 5 municipalities with biodiversity economy initiatives and 3 municipalities with climate change response interventions.

PRIORITY 2: REDUCE POVERTY & TACKLE THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

Performance highlights of 2025/26 included the following;

- A total of **3 140** verified beneficiaries were supported with agricultural input as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (**PES3**). Our food security initiative also resulted in 9 schools (including all agriculture schools, 3 schools in VanStadensrus and 1 school in Bethlehem) receiving support to implement food nutrition programmes.
- Our partnership agreements with the Red Cross, Meals on Wheels and SerDev supported food security projects in Thaba Nchu, Xhariep, Mangaung and Fezile Dabi and we established food gardens at various schools.

Our **commitments for 2026/27** include the following:

- a) Coordinate and implement the **Provincial Food and Nutrition Strategy** with the participation of all sector departments
- b) **Invest in food insecure rural areas.** This will be achieved, inter alia, through our cooperation agreements with the Red Cross and Meals on Wheels will continue and will be expanded to include the Ke Nako project of the Barolong boo Seleka in Thaba Nchu and food security projects in other traditional leadership areas as well as ward-based food security projects in collaboration with other partners.



- c) **2 500 Household producers** will be supported and we will further expand the establishment of vegetable gardens at schools.

PRIORITY 3: BUILD A CAPABLE, ETHICAL & DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

Hon Speaker, some of the performance highlights of 2025/26 include;

Youth, Women and People with Disabilities

- In 2025/26, we increased financial support to youth farmers from less than 5 percent to 31 percent of our CASP/Ilima conditional-grant envelope. That single shift is, quietly, one of the most consequential transformation acts of the year.
- Our Unemployed Agricultural Graduate Programme provides two-year work experience to 109 graduates.
- The Da Vinci Institute successfully delivered the Structured Incubated Entrepreneurial Programme for Food Producers & Food Manufacturers. The Women Entrepreneur Awards, facilitated in Fezile Dabi, awarded prize money of R3 million to 13 category winners. Mme Puseletso Lipali of Samjoy Legacy in Senekal was the 2025 overall winner.
- The Youth in Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry Awards in QwaQwa recognised 13 young farmers across five specialties; Mr Tumelo Pedi of Wepener was the overall winner, and VKB awarded each category winner a laptop.
- Over 700 learners participated in Junior LandCare camps and 140 schools took part in the 2025 Enviro-Quiz, won by Jacobsdal Combined School. **140 schools** participated in the 2025 Enviro-Quiz competition under the theme; “Promoting Environmental Stewardship Among Learners” The overall winner was the Jacobsdal Combined School.



Departmental Human Resource Capacity

- Our internal departmental capacity was strengthened with appointments under the Extension Recovery Programme of CASP, Veterinary Services and Glen College.
- A total of 16 officials in Agriculture opted to take the voluntary early retirement package option of whom 69% is in administration and 31% in line functions, i.e. Sustainable Resource Management (2) and Extension and Advisory Services (3)

Our **commitments for 2026/27** include the following:

- a) Strengthening internal capacity in the Department with targeted appointments in, amongst others, Extension Recovery Services, Veterinary Services and Glen College.
- b) Further Strengthening partnerships with all our stakeholders to contribute to improved governance and monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes
- c) Review and implement rural development sector plans as our contribution to achieve the DDM model and coordinate investment of sector departments investment in rural areas.
- d) Our investment in skills development will be manifested through Glen College of Agriculture, our Work-Integrated Learnerships with

AgriSeta, environmental awareness training involving 140 schools and 38 environmental capacity-building initiatives as well as the skills development of 1800 participants in the Agriculture sector.



- e) Improving accountability and control systems in the department towards achieving a clean audit, including payment of invoices within 30 days. During the 2025/26 financial year, the Department paid 797 out of 802 invoices within 30 days, translating into 99% payment of valid invoices within 30 days.

BUDGET ALLOCATION

Honourable Speaker, the Budget Vote structure now incorporates Environmental Affairs in line with the Proclamation amending Schedule 2 of the Public Service Act, 1994, gazetted on 10 July 2025. Environmental Affairs becomes Programme 9 of this Vote.

The Department for the MTEF 2026-2029 will receive an amount of **R1 089.079 million** in 2026/27, **R1 139.417 million** in 2027/28 and **R1 170.339 million** in 2028/29.

The budget allocation per programme is as follows;

- Administration: R242. 909 million
- Sustainable Resource Use & Management: R80 875 million,
- Agricultural Producer Support & Development: R393 488 million,
- Veterinary Services: R83 073 million,
- Research and Technology Development: R73 557 million
- Agricultural Economics Services: R17.554 million,
- Agricultural Education & Training: R24 762 million
- Rural Development: R13 356 million
- Environmental Affairs: R159 505 million



Note should be taken of the following earmarked funding;

- The **Infrastructure Enhancement Allocation (IEA)** amounts to **R54.262 million** with R20 million for Mohoma Mobung.
- **Specific Earmarked Equitable Share** amounts to **R19 million** allocated to Disaster Management R10 million, R5 million for FMD and R4 million for Waste Management under Environmental Affairs.
- **Conditional grants** amount to **R286. 377 million**. This comprises of **CASP** amounting to **R271.171 million** (noting that the Illima/Letsema grant is now merged with CASP) and **R10.071 million** for LandCare.

The R3.115 million EPWP allocation, initially allocated to DEDT in the Division of Revenue Bill is correctly reflected in the provincial Appropriation Bill as tabled. The anomaly will be rectified through normal budget-adjustment processes, with interim arrangements among all stakeholders to ensure continuity without delay.

Honourable Speaker, the Free State and North West provinces have secured a significant investment of \$5.4 million through the GEF-8 cycle of the Global Environment Facility. The project is entitled; “Restoration and sustainable development of Land for improved livelihoods in the degraded landscapes of the FS and NW provinces” and focuses on addressing degradation challenges across landscapes in the Letsemeng LM in the FS and the Greater Taung LM in the NW. The project will unfold over a 60-month / 5 year period.

The project architecture involves the GEF and International Union for Conservation of Nature (GEF Implementing Agent), the DFFE and DoA and the two provincial departments, NW DARD and FS DARDEA. Institutional, governance and coordinating protocols and community needs assessment planning are being finalized in the build-up to the inception workshop. Further protocol agreements will be concluded with other relevant stakeholders.



Earlier this week, the first Project Implementing Planning Meeting took place and the initiative is now being accelerated for implementation. We commit to continuously sharing further details with our Portfolio Committee.

The commercialization of black farmers is one of the most important priorities for inclusive growth in agriculture. The **Land Bank** play a critical role by providing production loans, asset finance, and tailored development finance for emerging farmers. We have concluded a MoU with the Land Bank to advance our black commercialization programme.

The **Industrial Development Corporation** approved approximately R140 million within its Agro-Processing and Agriculture Business Unit in 2025/26. Two Free State projects were approved — Dipati Farms (a piggery in Thabo Mofutsanyana) and Timeless Tomatoes (a horticulture project in Xhariep). The IDC's Free State pipeline for 2026/27 is promising and could unlock an estimated further R200m investment in agriculture projects, focusing on horticulture, poultry, animal feed, nuts, composting, horticulture, and livestock. These projects are in various project preparation stages – from basic assessment to due-diligence. This is real money, real projects and real commercial farmers. We are now collaborating pro-actively with intent and purpose with IDC.

The University of the Free State, through the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Development and Extension (*CENSARDE*), remains our committed partner. Under the TAGDev 2.0 programme we have built a strong working relationship anchored in practical, community-facing interventions. Our collaboration extends beyond the NWGA programme and includes training women in rural communities in grain processing and launching small agri-businesses whilst out-of-school youth, students and women are enrolling in agri-entrepreneurship, new venture creation programs and business pitching that provide structured incubation and ongoing business support. The DEDT is also a partner in this programme.



Partnerships are essential to unlock the full potential of agriculture, rural development and environmental affairs. No single institution can solve the complex challenges facing these sectors alone. We will formalize the provincial chapter of the AAMP this financial year and expand on social compact agreements in the rural development and environmental sectors.

CONCLUSION

Hon. Speaker, I have had extensive engagements with farmers throughout the Free State with the intention to reconnect the Department with our farming communities. Our farmers have approached these engagements honestly, frankly and constructively, highlighting not only challenges but also bringing creative and innovative proposals to the table. I have been particularly impressed with the positivity and optimism of the youth who firmly believe in the potential of agriculture to unlock sustainable livelihoods, growth and prosperity. I look forward to extending these engagements to our environmental sector.

Today, I must pay tribute and thank all farmers, producers and environmentalists of the Free State for their commitment and dedication to the beautiful art and science of agriculture, rural development and environmental affairs. The challenges we face are significant, but they are not insurmountable.

Honourable Speaker, allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the Head of Department, Mr. Tshepo Mabilo, the executive management, officials, my support staff and protectors. Our task now is to ensure effective implementation and to serve with diligence and integrity.

To the Chairperson and Portfolio Committee, we appreciate your collegiality in the way we work and your commitment to ensuring that we account appropriately for the responsibilities assigned to us.

I also wish to thank my children for their unwavering support



My appreciation goes to my organization, the African National Congress, as well as the Premier, and to Members of the Executive Council for their leadership and support.

Honourable Speaker, I table the 2026/27 Budget Vote of the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Affairs.

Thank you.

ANNEXURE A:

<i>Budget allocation per programme</i>	2026/27
	(R'000)
<i>Programmes</i>	
ADMINISTRATION	242 909
SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE & MANAGEMENT	80 875
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCER SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT	393 488
VETERINARY SERVICES	83 073
RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	73 557
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS SERVICES	17 554
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION & TRAINING	24 762
RURAL DEVELOPMENT	13 356
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS	159 505
Total for Programmes	1 089 079

<i>Budget allocation per economic classification</i>	2026/27
	(R'000)
<i>Economic classification</i>	
Compensation of employees	663 472
Goods and Services	175 512
Transfer payments	227 429
Payment for Capital assets	22 666
Total for Economic classification	1 089 079