Landmark move unlocks R12bn boost for South Africa's indigenous economy

In a landmark decision set to reshape South Africa's agricultural landscape, Agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen has approved the inclusion of indigenous crops and medicinal plants under th Marketing of Agricultural Products (Map) Act— formally recognising a R12bn sector with vast untapped economic potential.

Source: Pexels

The move is expected to unlock significant growth potential for small-scale farmers, traditional healers, an communities who rely on these natural resources for their livelihoods.

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

Unlocking the economic potential

According to the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC), the combined monetary value of medicir

plants and indigenous crops represents less than 3% of South Africa's R450bn annual agricultural output.

Of this amount, the traditional medicinal plant trade contributes approximately R3bn per year, while indigenous crops account for about R9bn. Most of this activity occurs outside the formal trade and therefo is an addition to the gross domestic product (GDP).

"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," Steenhuisen said.

The Minister emphasised the department's commitment to keeping its priorities alive, like pushing for a mo modern and progressive legislative and regulatory environment.

"Outdated legislation is a hindrance to the rapid absorption of new technologies, remedies, practices and innovations which are essential if we are to improve yield,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 th minister continued."

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.

Under the new declaration, indigenous crops include those that have their origin in South Africa, as well as plants that have become naturalised or traditionally cultivated over generations. They are broadly classifiec into three categories, including grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Indigenous grain crops are defined as those that yield starch- and protein-rich seeds suitable for food, wh indigenous fruit crops include marula, wild apricot, wild plum, raisin bush, and sour plum.

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Indigenous vegetable crops are subdivided into roots or tubers (cassava, amadumbe, marama bean and living potato) and leafy vegetables (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 also boas a rich variety of indigenous medicinal plants, several of which are internationally recognised for their therapeutic properties.

These include:

- **Buchu** (*Agathosma betulina*) - Used for urinary tract and stomach ailments, and as a diuretic.
- **Hoodia** (*Hoodia gordonii)* - Hoodia is a succulent plant found in the Kalahari Desert. It is traditionally used as an appetite suppressant.
- **Sutherlandia** (*Lessertia frutescens*) - Also known as "Cancer Bush" or "Balloon Pea," known as "Cancer Bush," used in traditional medicine for various conditions, including respiratory infections, stomach problems, and as a general immune booster.

- **Devil's Claw** (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) - It 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.
- **Aloe vera** - Although it is found in various parts of the world, Aloe vera is indigenous to South Africa, and widely used to soothe and heal burns, skin irritations, and wounds. It also has digestive and immune-enhancing properties.
- **African Wormwood** (*Artemisia afra*) - African Wormwood is a perennial shrub with aromatic leaves. has been used in traditional medicine to treat colds, coughs, and fevers.
- **African Potato** (*Hypoxis hemerocallidea*) - The African Potato is a perennial plant with tuberous roo It has traditionally been used to boost the immune system and alleviate symptoms of HIV/Aids. It is a believed to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.
- **Hooded Pelargonium** (*Pelargonium sidoides*) - Its roots are used to make a herbal remedy called Umckaloabo, which is used to treat respiratory tract infections, including bronchitis and sinusitis.
- **Wilde Als** (*Artemisia afra*), also known as African Wormwood - It is a shrub with fragrant leaves that h been used in traditional medicine for centuries. It is believed to have anti-inflammatory properties and used to alleviate various digestive disorders.

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With the inclusion of these products under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act — specifically, Act N 47 of 1996, the Minister noted that representative bodies of the newly declared agricultural products can, i 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 i terms of its own merits and may be recommended to the Minister for approval, provided that it meets the s 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," Steenhuisen said.