

# Local poultry producers blame minister

Astral CEO says the continued export of maize is harming the local chicken industry and making food more expensive for South Africans

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Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson is harming the local chicken industry as the state continues to export maize to the detriment of poultry producers, says Astral chief executive Chris Schutte.

The South African Poultry Association is bringing an anti-dumping case against Brazil for dumping whole chickens on the local market. Brazil is a member of Brics, which committed to building economic partnerships.

"The South African government has done nothing to help us remain competitive and is making food more expensive for South Africans," Mr Schutte said on Monday. "I will have to import maize for R2800 a tonne in February because we will have a maize shortage. This is the same maize that the minister decided we should export at R1400 a tonne."

He said transport and electricity costs had almost doubled in the past four years, which compounded the problem.

Brazil had the strategic vision to be the world's largest producer and exporter of chicken and its government worked together at all costs to achieve this, he said. "We are in trouble when it comes to integration; the different government departments don't talk to each other. Whereas the Department of Trade and Industry has asked how it can help, the Department of Agriculture is exporting the feed we need to keep costs down," Mr Schutte said.

The minister's spokesman, Selby Bokaba, said the department had a "comprehensive plan" to curtail Brazilian imports.

Brazil is one of the biggest maize producers, which makes its feed prices much lower than in South Africa. The country is the third-largest poultry exporter and more than 70% of poultry products imported to South Africa come from Brazil.

Poultry association CEO Kevin Lovell said on Monday that South Africa was "technically efficient" and could compete with other countries. But input and infrastructure costs have made it difficult to compete with Brazil.

The International Trade Administration Commission of South Africa is investigating whether Brazil is dumping chicken. It could take a year to complete the probe.

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