

MEDIA RELEASE

RECORD-BREAKING AFMA FORUM 2026 SETS A NEW BENCHMARK FOR INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

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PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA: The 12th AFMA Forum, held at Sun City from 8–10 September 2026, brought together more than 900 registered delegates, representing approximately 273 organisations and institutions across the feed and agricultural value chain, from more than 30 countries.

The scale of participation surpassed the previous Forum and was matched by exceptionally positive feedback from delegates, speakers and industry partners, many of whom described the 2026 event as the strongest AFMA Forum to date. The response reflected both the quality of the programme and the high level of engagement throughout the three days, while setting a new benchmark for future AFMA events.

Held under the theme *“The Feed Factor: The Chain That Feeds a Nation,”* the Forum focused on the issues and capabilities impacting the next phase of the feed industry - from market volatility, animal health and antimicrobial stewardship to nutrition, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, data and innovation.

AFMA Executive Director Liesl Breytenbach said the Forum demonstrated the value of bringing different parts of the agricultural value chain into one conversation. “The challenges and opportunities facing our industry increasingly cut across individual sectors. The Forum created an important space for practical discussion, stronger alignment and better-informed decision-making. The overwhelmingly positive response has been encouraging and has certainly raised the bar for AFMA going forward,” Breytenbach said.

AFMA Chairperson Anina Hunter said the 2026 Forum had been deliberately designed to respond to what the industry needs now rather than simply repeat previous formats. “We really thought long and hard about what the industry as a whole requires at this stage,” Hunter said. She said the programme was built around international and local expertise that could help the sector improve, with particular emphasis on animal health, affordable animal protein, productivity and the use of technology to enhance decision-making. Hunter also stressed that technology should complement, rather than replace, industry knowledge by helping it to be applied faster and more precisely.

Government and industry: creating an enabling environment

In his address to the Forum, Minister of Agriculture Willie Aucamp stressed that government’s role is to create an environment in which producers and businesses can operate efficiently, invest with confidence and innovate. He highlighted the importance of efficient, science-based regulation, stronger biosecurity, functioning infrastructure, expanded market access and continued cooperation between government and industry. His message reinforced a recurring theme throughout the Forum: competitiveness will increasingly depend on government and industry working together to remove constraints, enable investment and respond more effectively to shared challenges.

Confronting shared industry challenges

A dedicated antimicrobial stewardship session brought together veterinary, regulatory, government and feed-industry perspectives. The discussion reinforced that reducing reliance on antimicrobials requires a shared approach centred on disease prevention, responsible use, stronger biosecurity, sound nutrition and science-based evidence.

The panel concluded that it is a journey for South Africa and will require close cooperation across the animal-production value chain.

The CEO Leadership panel brought leaders from the poultry, pork, red-meat, dairy and grain sectors together to consider shared value-chain challenges and the role of organised agriculture in responding to them. They highlighted the need for a more coordinated export strategy across organised agriculture to strengthen South Africa's competitiveness and unlock market opportunities.

Innovating for tomorrow

Artificial intelligence, digital transformation and the future of feed manufacturing featured prominently throughout the Forum. Cynthia Zhu highlighted AI as a tool to support, rather than replace, human expertise, while Prof Henrik von Scheel emphasised AI-enabled operational excellence and a more integrated value chain. Following the Forum, a selected AFMA group, including representatives from member companies, participated in specialised AI Strategy training with Prof von Scheel. The group will report back on practical implementation and share relevant lessons to strengthen digital capability and innovation across the industry.

A global perspective on resilience and influence

Constance Cullman, Board Chair of the International Feed Industry Federation (IFIF) and CEO of the American Feed Industry Association (AFIA), brought a strong global perspective to the Forum's closing discussions, framing resilience around three actions: managing what can be controlled, adapting to what cannot, and influencing the environment in which the industry operates. Her message was that the feed industry should not only react to change, but also help shape it. That includes advocating for science-based, flexible regulation, supporting stronger international alignment and ensuring that policy and regulatory frameworks can keep pace with innovation.

Building future talent

A new feature of the 2026 Forum was the AFMA Student Industry Case Challenge, introduced for the first time to strengthen the connection between academia and the animal feed industry. The initiative brought together 12 postgraduate students from six South African universities, representing Agricultural Economics and Animal Nutrition. Working in mixed-university teams, the students were tasked with developing practical recommendations around a realistic feed-industry business case and presenting their solutions to industry judges and delegates.

Recognising industry excellence

The Forum also recognised outstanding leadership, technical contribution and emerging talent across the industry. Dr Erhard Briedenhann was named AFMA Person of the Year 2026, Dr Kyle Venter received the AFMA Technical Person of the Year Award, and Soné Nell of Stellenbosch University was named AFMA Student of the Year 2026.

From discussion to continued action

Breytenbach said the value of the Forum now lies in carrying the strongest ideas and priorities beyond Sun City. "A successful Forum should not end when the programme closes. The real value lies in what we take forward - strengthening partnerships, improving the way we work and turning good discussion into practical action for the industry," Breytenbach said.

AFMA will build on the insights generated through continued engagement with its members, government, industry partners and the broader agricultural value chain. The strong participation, international representation and overwhelmingly positive response to the 2026 event reinforced the Forum's role as a leading platform for industry insight, collaboration and forward-looking discussion across the feed and agricultural value chain.

About AFMA

AFMA is the official representative body of the formal animal feed manufacturing industry in South Africa, representing approximately 59% of national feed production. The Association plays a central role in feed safety, regulatory engagement, training, and industry collaboration in support of food security and sustainable animal production.

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