

# Chicken à la King

## Poultry is more popular than ever in the midst of a challenging landscape for producers and retailers



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### Weathering the storm

**D**ue to its ability to be paired with many other foods, nutritional benefits, the ease with which it can be prepared and cooked and – until recently – affordability, chicken is the most popular meat by far in South Africa. It provides a versatile base for menu preparation, can be stretched by adding other ingredients and provides a lean, filling, high-quality protein. According to the South African

Poultry Industry (SAPA), the poultry industry is the largest single contributor to the agricultural sector in South Africa. The popularity of poultry looks set to stay, and grow, but there's no denying the local poultry industry in South Africa is facing a rather sombre current landscape – and a challenging future, at least in the short-term. The question is, can local poultry producers weather the storm? Meanwhile, retailers need to ask themselves how they can help consumers, support local producers, and keep their own heads above water.



Image courtesy of www.astralchicken.com/

### A tough landscape gets tougher

There are three major factors at play in the local poultry industry at present. Load shedding, the high cost of feed grain, and the devastating effects of the worst global outbreak of avian flu the industry has ever experienced. It's safe to say that consumers will be feeling the effects of these challenges in their pockets and on the shelves of their local stores for the foreseeable future.

**Loadshedding.** The impact of load shedding on the poultry sector in South Africa has been catastrophic, particularly for smaller farms and producers, many of whom have not survived. With load shedding affecting everything from incubation to slaughter, Eskom's inability to keep the power on for a staggering combined total of 1 296 blackout hours – equivalent to 54 full days of no power this year alone – has severely constrained poultry production.

**The cost of grain feed.** The high cost of grain feed is a result of several factors, says www.farmprogress.com, including Russia's war into Ukraine, unusual weather, global economic conditions and geo-political unrest.



Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 30 minutes  
Cooking time: 75 minutes

Few things are more South African than potjiekos and braaibroodjies. This recipe adds a modern twist.

## GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY 4 Chicken Drumsticks and 4 Chicken Thighs

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

30ml canola oil  
4 Chicken Drumsticks,  
4 Chicken Thighs  
1 onion, sliced  
Salt and pepper  
10ml smoked paprika  
10ml dried thyme  
2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes  
250ml chicken stock  
2 x 400g tins brown lentils  
10g parsley, chopped

#### Braaibroodjies

30g butter, softened  
8 slices white bread  
250g cheddar cheese, grated  
1 tomato, thinly sliced  
1 onion, thinly sliced  
salt and pepper

## CHICKEN, LENTIL AND TOMATO POT WITH BRAAIBROODJIES

### Method:

#### Chicken

Heat 15ml oil in a braai pot over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and brown on all sides. Remove from the pot. Add the remaining 15ml of oil. Add the onion and cook until softened. Add a pinch of salt, pepper, paprika and dried thyme. Cook for a further minute, and then add the tomatoes and chicken stock. Place the chicken pieces back into the pot. Cook the stew over low heat for about 45 minutes. Add the drained lentils and cook for a further 15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Top with fresh, chopped parsley before serving.

#### Braaibroodjies

Butter both sides of each piece of bread. Divide the cheddar between four slices, and then top with tomato and onion. Season with salt and pepper and place another piece of plain, buttered bread on top. Place the sandwiches between a closed grid. Grill over medium heat, taking care not to burn the broodjies. Turn occasionally and braai until golden and crispy.

Serve the braai pot with the cheesy braaibroodjies.



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The 2023 outlook for feed grain is high prices, high costs and tight margins. In an article published on 28 August 2023, [www.worldgrain.com](http://www.worldgrain.com) says “the disruption of the global grain supply chain largely due to the Ukraine-Russia conflict has impacted the feed industry in many countries, with South Africa reporting a net effect of high prices due to the high cost of corn and oilcake, the main raw materials in the manufacture of animal feed.”

A report from the Animal Feed Manufacturers Association concurs with this view, saying feed manufacturers in South Africa have had to increase their prices in response to the climbing cost of raw materials. Wandile Sihlobo, Chief Economist of the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (Agbiz) says, “As a small open economy, South Africa is interlinked with the global grains and oilseeds market, and domestic prices tend to follow global price movements — and this is what we observed [since 2020].”

**Avian Influenza.** The South African Poultry Association (SAPA) recently announced that local poultry farmers are contending with two different strains of the virus, H5N1 and a new strain identified as H7N6. This latest outbreak is courtesy of a highly infectious strain that has resulted in the culling of millions of birds – mostly on laying farms. The government is mulling the possibility of fast-tracking bird flu vaccinations for local flocks, and there is a real possibility that the outbreak could be under control in 12 months. But with time of the essence, these deliberations are simply dragging on too long to prevent serious shortages

Image courtesy of [www.astralchicken.com/](http://www.astralchicken.com/)



by December 2023. With recent outbreaks further decimating flocks, leading retailers to ration eggs, the Department of Trade and Industry has directed the International Trade Administration Commission (<http://www.itac.org.za/>) to relook the suspension of anti-dumping tariffs for chicken, which ended in August 2023. According to Business Tech, “A new rebate on these tariffs is being considered to encourage imports to alleviate the current shortages.”

This is a contentious issue, as local producers have pointed out that in the time it takes to receive these imports, consumers will have already felt the effects of the shortages, and local producers will be on their way to recovering their flocks. They would also prefer that government allows local groups to undertake the imports,

without encouraging the import of inferior quality birds.

That said, a recent IOL article quoted Anthony Clark, an independent analyst at Small Talk Daily, who said of possible increased imports: “Should ITAC agree, and that’s not a given, any increase in poultry imports to meet any domestic poultry production shortfall will realistically – given supply chain logistics, ports and State vet checks – only occur into late-December 2023 into January 2024.”

But what does this mean for retailers/wholesalers and consumers? The competition commission has already taken notice of the ‘rationing’ of eggs where consumers are limited in how many they can buy, and prices are expected to rise sharply in the face of ongoing shortages.



Image courtesy of [www.hightoppoultry.com/](http://www.hightoppoultry.com/)

Laying farms that have culled their birds and undertaken the strict decontamination and double cleaning protocol are waiting to re-start their flocks as they anticipate further outbreaks, and those that are importing fertilised eggs are only doing so in



Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 130 minutes  
Cooking time: 40 minutes

## GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY Chicken Drumsticks

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ½ cup double-cream yoghurt | 1 can cherry tomatoes        |
| 8 chicken drumsticks       | 2 tsp turmeric               |
| 3 tbsp oil                 | 2 tsp garam masala           |
| 1 onion, chopped           | 2 tsp ground coriander       |
| 4 garlic cloves, minced    | 2 tsp ground cumin           |
| 1cm ginger, grated         | 1 cup cream                  |
| 3 tbsp tomato paste        | 10g fresh coriander, chopped |
| 1 tsp chilli flakes        |                              |

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## CHICKEN TIKKA

Did you know that chicken tikka was popularised by South Asian cooks living in Great Britain?

#### Method:

1. Marinate the chicken in yoghurt for 2 hours.
2. Add a dash of oil to a pot. Add the onions, garlic, and ginger and fry for a minute or two.
3. Add the tomato paste and chilli. Cook, stirring, until the paste's colour changes.
4. Add the tomatoes and spices. Simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Gently add the chicken to the pot and cook for 20 minutes.
6. Add the cream and coriander, and serve over rice.

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relatively small numbers. The BBC reported on the impact of the egg shortage, saying “More than half of South Africans live below the poverty line. They already spend about 35% of their income on food and according to the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity research group, this share will likely increase as a result of the egg shortage.”

In early October 2023, IOL reported Sapa’s Izaak Breitenbach as saying that egg shortages were already being felt, and the reduced production of local chicken meat would be felt in six to eight weeks’ time. In the article, Breitenbach notes that he expected chicken imports to increase to supply local demand, particularly in the peak months of November and December, adding that frozen chicken portions were being imported from Brazil and the United States, and bird flu restrictions had been lifted from Ireland, Spain and Argentina, allowing these countries to resume exports to South Africa.

It’s a tough one, as local producers are concerned that cheaper imports could have a negative impact on the local industry. Already reeling from financial and stock losses, having to contend with low-cost imports could result in further job losses and more pressure on local producers. Breitenbach concludes ...

“ This problem is not going away tomorrow. It will take us six to 18 months to replace the stock that we have culled to date. Some producers are reluctant to restock immediately, as their new replacement stock might also have to be culled. ”

While the current landscape presents challenges, South Africa’s consumers are still turning in their millions to chicken as an affordable protein source. However, this may prove to be difficult to sustain. In August, when the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) released its most recent food price basket costs, it was noted that both eggs and chicken had increased in price. On top of economic instability and more severely constrained consumers, these rising prices have the potential to push chicken out of reach for many households. To mitigate this, retailers and wholesalers have an opportunity to double down on working with local producers to provide budget-friendly, value for money options wherever possible, without sacrificing the quality and range of choice that their customers have come to expect.

## Innovation as a growth driver

Many producers have recognised the need to appeal to a range of tastes, needs, and desires. Key to this is convenience. From pre-marinated and deboned gourmet flatties for the braai, to air fryer-friendly crumbed shapes for kids, the range of poultry products on offer has grown and continues to expand. Recognising trends in flavours and seasoning, meeting a range of price points, and also catering for a variety of cooking methods to counter load shedding are inspiring producers and manufacturers to come up with new additions to existing ranges, and interesting new products.



Painted, hard-boiled eggs are sold in Germany all year round but production is ramped up for the Dutch market around Easter. The paint line runs at full capacity from the beginning of February until Easter when 5 machines run 24/7 turning out millions of colourful eggs. Vibrantly coloured eggs always do well and are an eye-catcher during the holiday season. White cage and aviary eggs are mostly used on the paint line. The painting process is divided into 2 main techniques, using either spray paint or airbrushing for a luxury look. All colours are possible, as well as multiple combinations. Special designs can also be created by marbling or turning the freshly painted eggs over a sponge. Original article: <https://www.poultryworld.net/>  
Photo by Bert Jansen.



Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 25 minutes  
Cooking time: 50 minutes

## GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY Chicken Thighs

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

30ml ghee or sunflower oil  
8 chicken thighs  
1 large onion, chopped  
5ml paprika  
2,5ml turmeric  
2,5ml ground cinnamon  
50ml pomegranate molasses  
200ml chicken stock  
80g walnuts, pounded with a pestle and mortar until coarsely ground

#### Jewelled rice:

500ml basmati rice, cooked  
40ml ghee or butter  
1 onion, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
2,5ml ground cumin  
2,5ml turmeric  
a pinch of cinnamon  
5ml honey  
salt and pepper  
100ml cranberries or sultanas  
60ml pistachios, chopped  
125ml pomegranate rubies  
fresh coriander and parsley

## PERSIAN CHICKEN BAKE WITH JEWELLED RICE

This Persian chicken dish is packed with wonderful flavours that are set to wow your dinner guests.

#### Method:

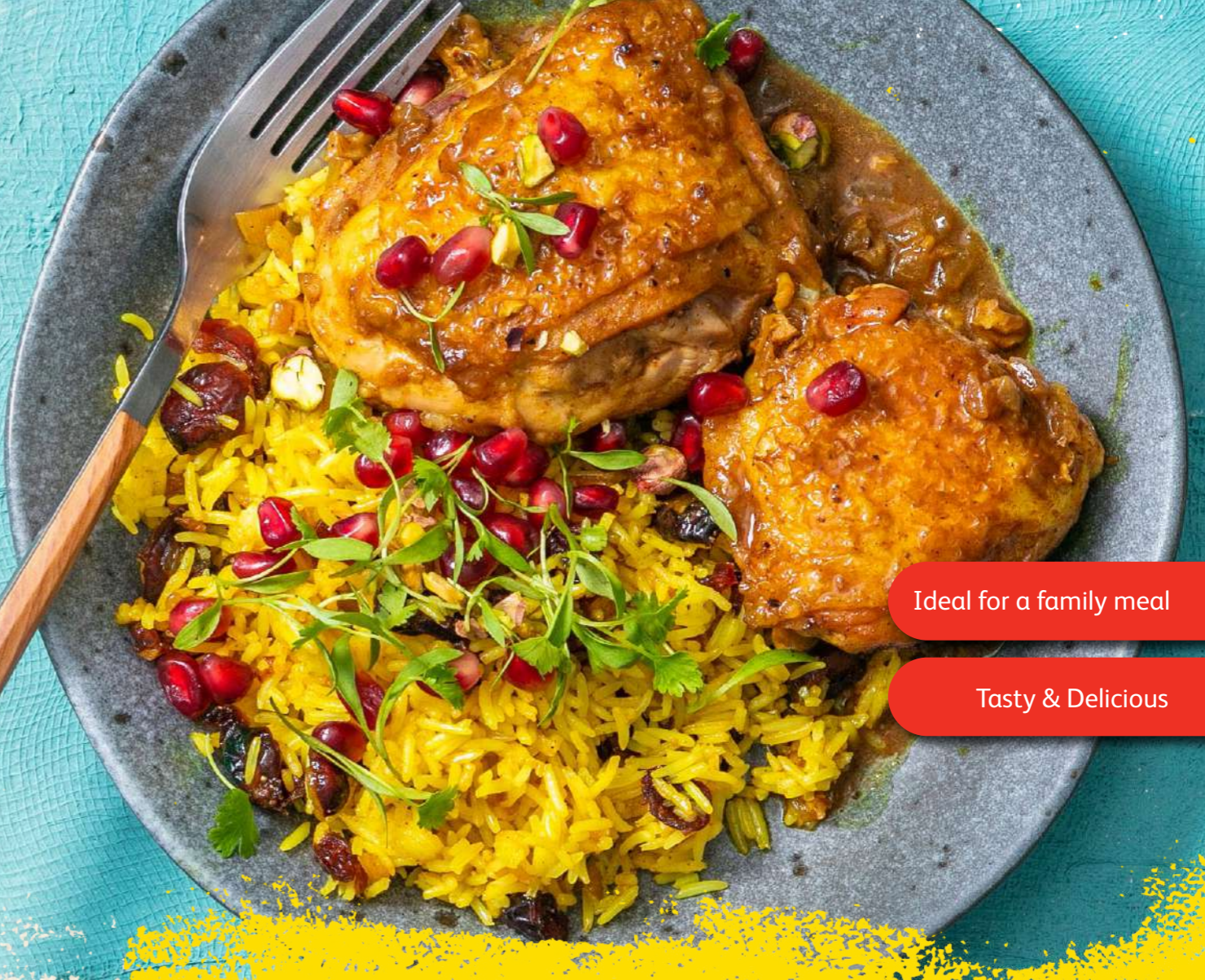
Preheat the oven to 200°C.

Heat the ghee or oil in an ovenproof casserole on medium heat. Brown the chicken on both sides. Season and remove from the casserole.

Add the onion and cook until softened. Add the spices, pomegranate molasses, stock and walnuts, and bring to the boil. Add the chicken back into the casserole. Place in the oven for about 40 minutes until cooked through (the sauce should have thickened). Taste and adjust the seasoning, if necessary. Serve with the jewelled rice (see below), fresh parsley and coriander.

#### To make the jewelled rice:

Heat the ghee or butter in a large frying pan and cook the onion and garlic until soft and golden brown. Add the rice, spices, honey and cranberries. Allow to cook for a few minutes to allow the flavours to develop. Add the pistachios and pomegranate rubies and serve with the chicken.



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Image courtesy of <https://izzycooking.com/>



China has emerged as the second largest destination for U.S. poultry exports, increasing from only \$10 million in 2019 to a record \$1.1 billion in 2022. This is a remarkable increase of more than 10 000% in just 4 years, despite bird flu and trade bans. What is interesting is that this recovery has been driven by one product – frozen chicken feet, which are apparently preferred by Chinese consumers for their unique large size and consistent high quality. Chicken feet accounted for more than 85% of all U.S. poultry exported to China in 2022.

[www.farmprogress.com/poultry-news/](http://www.farmprogress.com/poultry-news/)

Many consumers are excited to try something new and are often persuaded to make purchase decisions based on convenience, the chance to experiment with new flavours, and the need to provide something different for dinner, especially when preparing meals and snacks for children, which after all can be something of a challenge – any help in this area will be greatly appreciated by time- and idea-constrained mums, dads and other caregivers.

Innovation doesn't only include taste and flavour combinations for prepared or ready-to-cook products. It touches snack and deli offerings, frozen products, and, of course, everything braai. From coatings, seasonings, sauces, and cook-in bags to ready-made marinades and more, local consumers enjoy variety in their poultry products.

## Value for money

For most consumers, value for money is a critical purchase driver. Promotions, special offers and bulk buying value deals will help consumers deal with higher prices. Retailers can also offer more deli and ready-to-eat or heat-and-eat chicken products that contain a smaller amount of chicken paired with grains, vegetables and filling carbs. Providing recipe ideas to stretch a whole chicken over multiple meals, and meal preparation suggestions for different parts of the chicken, will allow consumers to continue to buy chicken and chicken products through the tough times. Pocket-friendly solutions that appeal to consumers and answer basic nutritional needs are also a good way of retaining customers.



Poultry is a menu staple at many food establishments. Poultry is also a high-risk food, which means it has ideal conditions for the growth of dangerous pathogens that can cause food-borne illnesses. For this reason, it is essential that food businesses and food handling staff know how to handle poultry safely at all stages, from purchasing and receiving, to storing, thawing, preparing and cooking. Proper handling of high-risk foods like poultry is essential to maintaining food safety, protecting customers and the food business, and preventing food-borne illness outbreaks.

Image & caption: <https://blog.foodsafety.ca/how-buy-store-and-prepare-poultry-safely>



In the catchment area of the River Wye, 24 million chickens are farmed, and their waste is spread as fertiliser, but during heavy rainfall, it can leach into the river. Natural England downgraded the status of the River Wye in May due to the pollution. Original article: [www.poultryworld.net/](http://www.poultryworld.net/) Photo: Canva

## Where human health and animal welfare meet

There are a growing number of consumers who are concerned with animal welfare, and increasingly knowledgeable about terms such as free range and pasture raised. More consumers are demanding transparency, open dialogues, and actual commitment to better farming and production practices, humane slaughter practices, and ethical egg production. And they are willing to either pay or limit their expenditure accordingly, to put their money where their beliefs and values are.

In addition to this, there are those shoppers who might be less swayed by the ethical debate, but who whole-heartedly believe that organic, hormone-free, free-range produce is healthier. Health-conscious consumers are heavily invested in foods that are better for them, more sustainable, and which offer better health benefits. This is a shift that can be maximised in heat-and-eat, deli, and ready-to-cook poultry offerings.



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Eggs that can't be hatched are removed as they go through the scanner.  
Noal Farm: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOE4VsR31hI>

## Technology in agriculture ... Saviour or destroyer?

In the face of hardship, the global poultry industry continues to innovate. The agtech revolution is coming, says Aidan Connolly, President of AgriTech Capital LLC. In an article for Poultry World, Connolly explains how, much like in the health sector, robots and AI can be deployed to manage cutting, deboning, and packaging of poultry products. Technology can not only improve quality, safety, and productivity, it can also help with animal welfare concerns.

The internet of things (IoT) can be used to manage bird welfare by continually monitoring temperature, ventilation, humidity, lighting, and even air quality. In addition to this, AI can analyse data and identify potential health problems.

Connolly reiterates that while agtech can negatively impact human employment in the short term, it does open up the possibility of more stimulating, higher-paid jobs requiring better skilled workers to manage the technology. And as agtech improves the quality, quantity, and consistency of production, this in turn paves the way to hiring these skilled workers. It will require significant investment, both in terms of capital and time, but Connolly says, "At the end of the day, the poultry workers and chicken businesses that will survive the tech transition are the ones investing and embracing high-skill training programmes now. In fact, those who prepare for disruptive innovation will enjoy new levels of productivity, profits, and job satisfaction."

## Key takeaways

Local retailers and consumers should brace for increased and ongoing poultry shortages, as well as further price increases. There's no easy way to weather this storm. Consumption, and therefore sales, will fall. But local producers need the continued support of local retailers, and in time, the South African poultry industry will in all likelihood recover.

In the meantime, continued innovation and flexible thinking around existing products and offerings can help shoppers afford poultry and poultry products. It is essential to maintain a high quality, and also offer value for money deals whenever possible. **SR**



Image courtesy of [www.vencomaticgroup.com/](http://www.vencomaticgroup.com/)

### Sources:

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**Ann Baker-Keulemans** writes on topics related to business, lifestyle, technology, and health, with extensive knowledge on the SA retail and wholesale landscape. Contact [annbk@wilkinsross.co.za](mailto:annbk@wilkinsross.co.za) | [www.wilkinsrossglobal.com](http://www.wilkinsrossglobal.com)



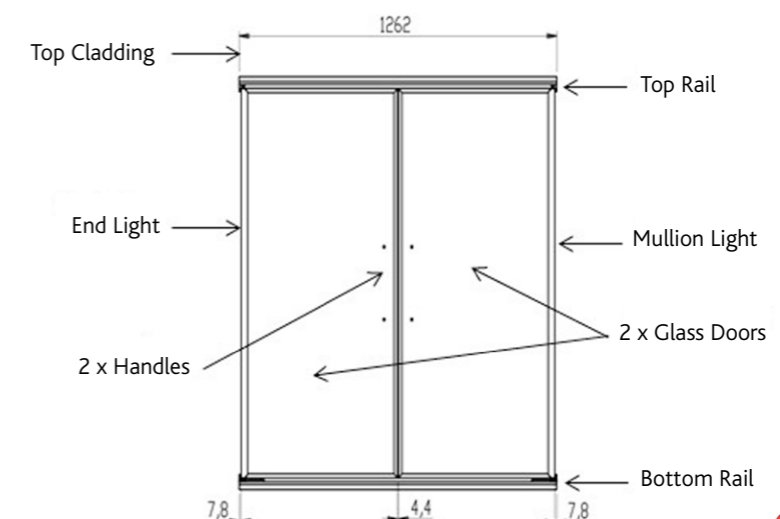
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