

Career Profile: Agricultural Economist

Agricultural economists are concerned with all economic aspects that influence the development of agriculture and the distribution of agricultural products. They must understand what is involved in food manufacturing, processing, distribution and purchasing and take into account the impact of international trade on existing and potential markets. The agricultural economist's broad knowledge of agriculture, finance, commerce and social science enables him/her to understand the factors that influence agricultural production, sales and marketing. Commercial farmers look to agricultural economists to assist them to design financial and marketing systems that enable them to develop and distribute their agricultural products efficiently and profitably.

There are a number of different roles that an agricultural economist can play within this broad field.

Possible roles include:

Agribusiness management

- Developing, designing and managing supply chains, for example identifying all the links from a dairy farm to delivery of the milk to supermarkets.
- Farm planning and control, e.g. how it obtains information, budgeting, managing farm machinery, which crops are economical, the cost of labour, how the farms are developing, what risks they face from rising costs.

Marketing

- Conducting market research and surveys and examining relationships with other countries to determine demand for food and fibre products.
- Analyzing financial needs, working out what is achievable, how much profit is possible and cash available.

Resource economist (identifying how natural resources can be used and preserved)

- Working out what is happening to environmental resources, the impact of air and water pollution, what should be done to conserve them.

Agriculture and rural development

- Identifying what government programmes for specific commodities such as maize, sorghum, or other traditional grains or vegetables will support incomes of farmers and provide food and fibres for low-income consumers.
- Helping to draw up business plans and support small-scale and resource-poor farmers, e.g. identifying suitable implements for animal traction as an alternative to using a tractor and the possible benefits.

Education Requirements

National Senior Certificate (NSC)

For a career in agricultural economics students are advised to select Mathematics, Physical Science and Biology/Agriculture and to add to this a selection from the designated subjects. These are subjects that are particularly suitable for tertiary study.

Bachelor Degree

A four year degree programme that focuses on developing knowledge and skills for entry into careers in agricultural economics/agribusiness.

Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics – BSc (Agri. Econ/Agri. Business) (4 years) BCom (Agri-business) (3 years) economics and business management for agriculture **BAgric. Admin option (3 years)** with Agricultural Economics and Animal and Plant production.

Offered at:

- [North-West University](#)¹(Faculty of Agriculture, Science & Technology - Mafikeng campus)
- [University of Limpopo](#)² (Faculty of Science and Agriculture)
- [University of Pretoria](#)³ (Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences)

Admission requirements

As admission requirements vary from one institution to another, find out what the specific requirements are by checking on the website and contacting the university if you have any queries.

Possible Employers

- [Agri South Africa](#)⁴
- Agribusiness firms
- Food and fibre organizations
- Government institutions
- NGOs'
- Rural development institutions
- Farming and ecotourism

¹ <http://www.uniwest.ac.za/faculties/ast/index.html>

² <http://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=Faculty%20of%20Science%20and%20Agriculture>

³ <http://web.up.ac.za/default.asp?ipkCategoryID=48>

⁴ <http://www.agriinfo.co.za/>

- Commercial banks
- Research and policy institutions
- Universities

Find out more

Find out more about agricultural economics and agribusiness, bursaries and jobs:

- The website for the [National Department of Agriculture](http://www.nda.agric.za/)⁵ provides much useful information, e.g. information about bursaries offered by the Department (select Regulatory and other services and then Education and training), statistical information on agriculture and economic reviews, and links to other sites like the Agricultural Research Council (ARC)
- [Interesting articles about science](http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/)⁶ with periodic articles especially relevant to Africa, e.g. African fruits that could help alleviate hunger and bolster rural development, February 2008.
- [Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research](http://www.cgiar.org/)⁷, a partner of many countries in Africa for over thirty years.

⁵ <http://www.nda.agric.za/>

⁶ <http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/>

⁷ <http://www.cgiar.org/>

Are you suited to this career?

This quick quiz can help you to identify whether you are suited for this occupation. The questions are based on interests, characteristics and values typical of people who work as agricultural economists.

Quiz	Yes	No
Are you interested in working in the natural environment?		
Are you interested in the contribution economics and science can make to agriculture?		
Do you enjoy Mathematics, Science and Biology?		
Are you detailed and thorough in analysing problems?		
Are you able to think broadly when seeking solutions to problems?		
Do you have a systematic and organized way of working?		
Do you work well with other people?		
Do you communicate your ideas clearly to others orally and in writing?		
Are you a good listener?		
Do you like to find out how things work?		

If you have mainly yes answers it may be an indication that this is an occupation to consider.