

# **The Agricultural Economics discipline in a socially transforming South Africa: status, effects, responses and the future**

Charles Machethe



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# Outline

- Meaning of social transformation as it relates to South Africa.
- Consequences of this transformation for Economy, Agriculture and Agricultural Economics?
- Background on the Agricultural Economics discipline in South Africa.
- Agricultural economics status, effects and responses.
- The discipline's future in South Africa.



# Social transformation: Meaning

- A process “to increase the distribution of opportunities and benefits from economic growth, particularly to the poorest and most excluded” (Melamed, 2013).
- Transformation leads to greater equity by focusing on increasing employment, expanding high-quality education, and providing high-quality health care and social protection.
- Transformation implies some fundamental change in core societal institutions, polity and economy.
- Transformation affects the agricultural sector, higher education and agricultural economics.



# Social transformation in South Africa: Economy

- High expectations for transformation but partly realised.
- Transformation difficult in political and economic areas, especially the latter.
- Wealth distribution not occurred at expected pace.
- Land reform proceeded at slow pace, leaving land ownership skewed in favour of whites.
- Income inequality remains high : Gini coefficient of 0.65.
- Unemployment rate at 26%.



# Social transformation in South Africa: Agriculture

- Agriculture remains one of the least transformed sectors.
- Agriculture is still dualistic : commercial and subsistence/smallholder; developed and resource-poor --- 40 000 commercial farmers produce 95% of marketed output and more than 3 million black farmers account for 5%.
- Decline in number of commercial farmers and homeland agricultural production.
- Public management of agriculture changed: Department of Agriculture plus forestry and fisheries and DRDLR when there was only one ministry of Agriculture and Land Affairs in 1994.



# Social transformation : Higher education

- Rationalisation after 1994 and new universities established later.
- Increased enrolment of blacks in HWUs while little has changed in racial composition of students in HBUs.
- Disappearance of faculties of agriculture as they were known – merger of faculties leading to faculties of NAS.
- Reconfiguration of agricultural economics departments (e.g. Agric Econ & Extension).
- More black students studying agriculture (positive attitude towards agriculture).



# Names of academic departments

University	Name
Stellenbosch	Agricultural Economics
Pretoria	Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development
KwaZulu-Natal	Agricultural Economics
Free State	Agricultural Economics
Fort Hare	Agricultural Economics and Extension
Limpopo	Agricultural Economics and Animal Production
Venda	Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness
North West	Agricultural Economics and Extension



# Background on the Agricultural Economics discipline in SA

- Formal higher education in agricultural began at Stellenbosch in 1925.
- University of Pretoria followed in 1928.
- University of KwaZulu-Natal in 1947.
- Free State in 1948.
- Fort Hare was the first HBU to offer agricultural economics in 1970.
- University of Limpopo followed in 1975.
- Venda and North West in 1985 and 1988, respectively.





## Year of establishment and age of Agricultural Economics departments

University	Year of establishment	Age
Stellenbosch	1925	91
Pretoria	1928	88
KwaZulu-Natal	1947	69
Free State	1958	58
Fort Hare	1970	46
Limpopo	1975	41
Venda	1985	31
North West	1988	28



# Agricultural Economics discipline in SA: status, effects and responses

- Human resources (Staffing)
- Teaching
- Research
- Policy contribution



# Status, effects and responses: Human resources (Staffing)

- Departments of Agricultural Economics in South Africa are characterised by small academic staff complement.
- Staff complement often ranges from four to ten permanent academic staff members.
- Hence, there is a tendency to use of temporary and/or part-time lecturers to cope with heavy teaching loads.
- Heavy reliance on this practice does not contribute to the sustainability of agricultural economics departments.



# Permanent academic staff complement in Agricultural Economics departments

University	Permanent academic staff
Stellenbosch	7
Pretoria	10
KwaZulu-Natal	6
Free State	16
Fort Hare	8
Limpopo	6
Venda	4
North West	4

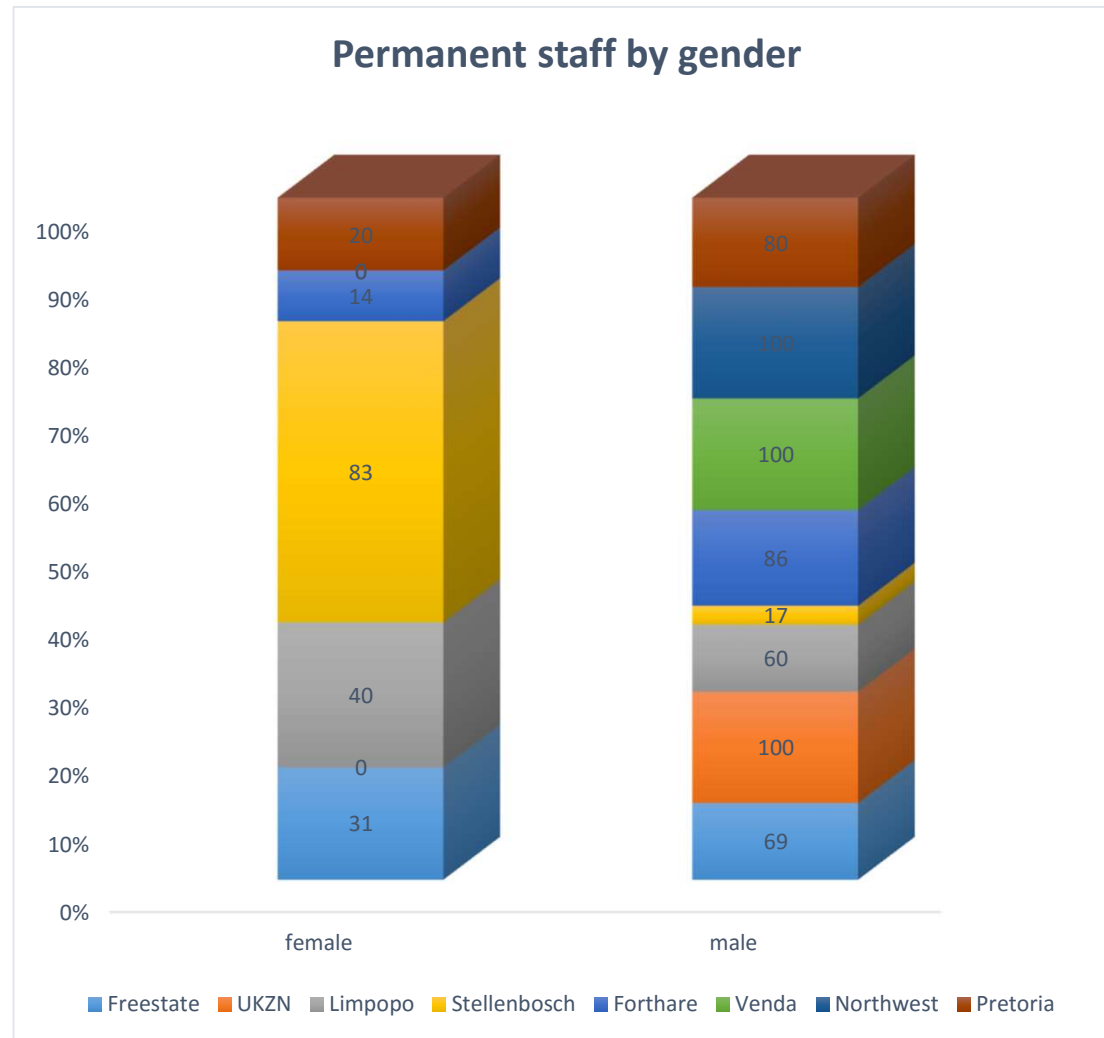


# Status, effects and responses: Human resources (Staffing)

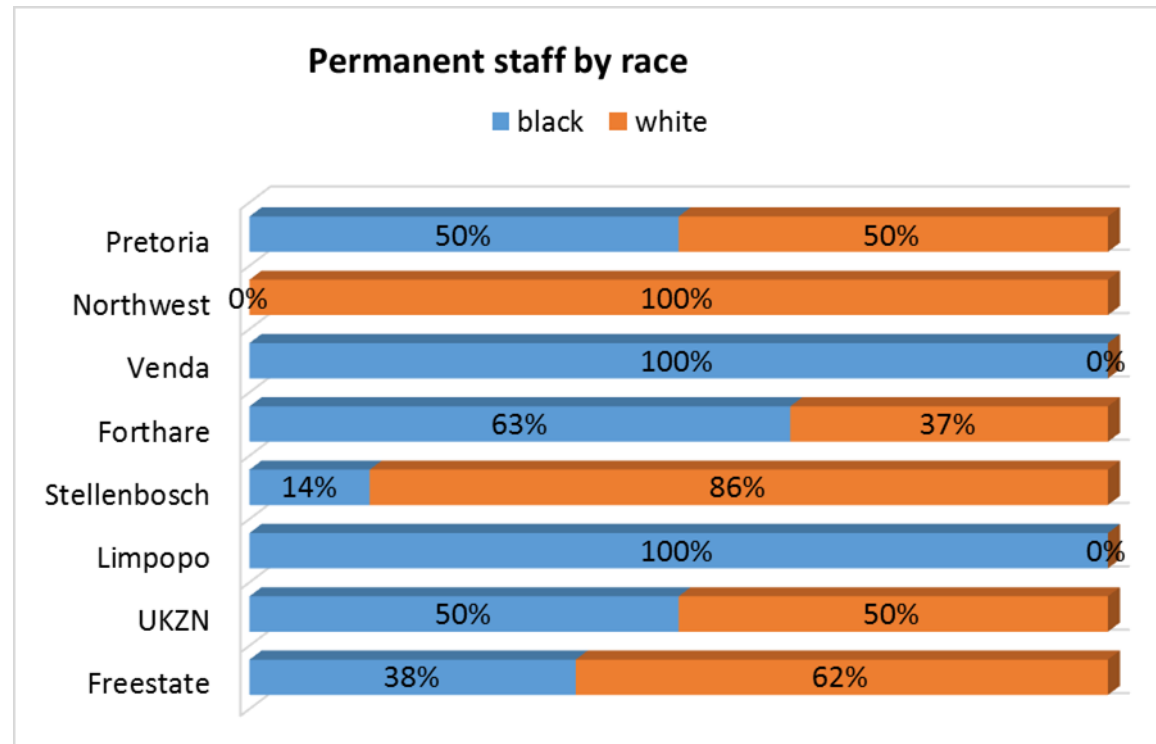
- The composition of our departments in terms of gender has not changed much over the years.
- Most agricultural economics departments are still predominantly male --- Permanent male academic staff comprise between about 75%.
- Staff composition in terms of race has changed significantly over the years – Average black : 52%.
- In HWU -- 62% of permanent academic staff are white.
- In HBU -- 66% of permanent academic staff are black.



# Permanent academic staff by gender



# Permanent academic staff by race



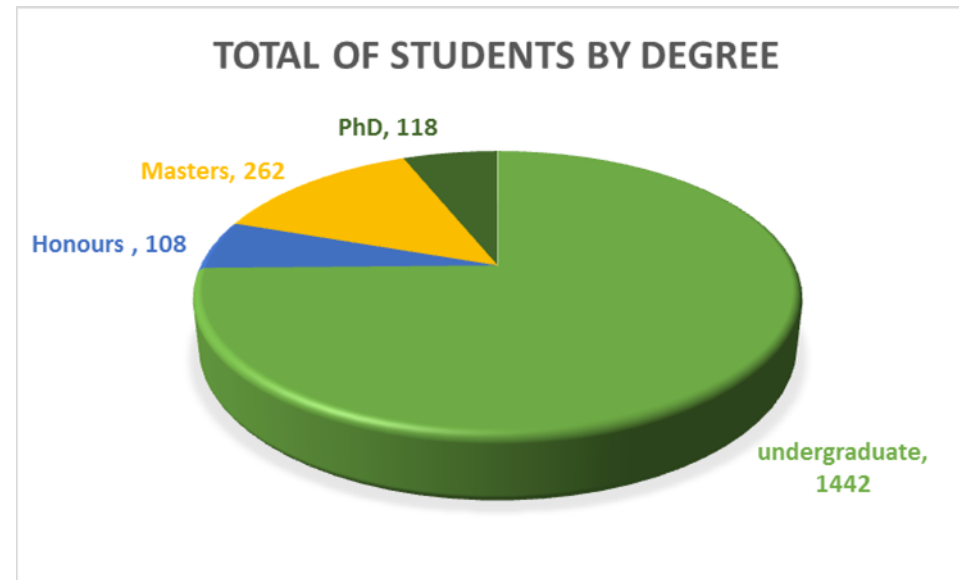
# Status, effects and responses: Human resources (Teaching)

- All Agricultural Economics departments offer training at Bachelors, Masters and PhD levels.
- Initially, the departments only offered a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree, followed by the relevant Honours, Masters and PhD degrees.
- Some of the departments also offered (and still do) Agricultural Economics as a major subject in the Bachelor of Commerce degree.
- However, in the last three decades, there has been a move towards presentation of degrees that are management or policy oriented, such as Bachelor of Agricultural Management/Administration.
- A glance at academic programmes shows little or no incorporation of other social sciences courses (politics) – focus on policy analysis and none on policy formation and implementation.

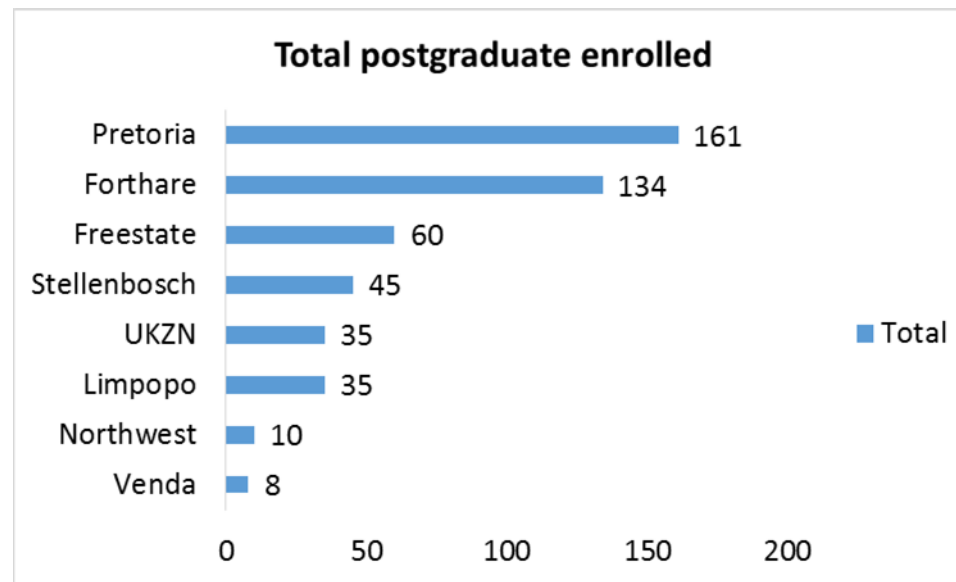




# Status, effects and responses: Human resources (Teaching)



# Graduate student enrolment



# Status, effects and responses: Human resources (Staffing)

- Shortage of trained black and female agricultural economists with PhD is likely to continue, especially for South Africans.
- Very difficult to attract black South Africans to PhD programmes.
- Attributable to various factors including unattractiveness of careers in teaching and research in terms of remuneration.
- High demand for female agricultural economists in both public and private sectors.
- Slow progress in transforming some universities to reflect the demographics of the country.



# Status, effects and responses: Research

- Most agricultural economics departments undertake research on policy issues as shown by the various publications generated by these departments.
- However, there is no indication that the research undertaken was informed by policy challenges confronting agriculture and rural development in the country.
- There are few research projects undertaken by agricultural economics departments commissioned by government departments to address specific issues related to policy.



# Status, effects and responses: Policy contribution

- One of the most effective ways for the discipline to affect or influence national issues is through its effect on policy processes.
- The agricultural economics profession can contribute to policy directly or indirectly.
- The direct contribution of the profession to policy occurs when agricultural economists participate directly in the policy process.
- The indirect contribution of the profession to policy relates to a situation where the products of the profession (e.g. research, publications, graduates, public comments, etc.) have a bearing on the policy process.
- Contribution of the profession seems to be largely through their participation in organisations playing a major role in the policy process.



# The discipline's future

- Teaching
- Research
- Contribution to policy



# The discipline's future (Teaching)

- Impact of fees must fall campaign
- Decolonisation of the curriculum
- Enrolment of international students
- Increased emphasis on on-line learning



# The discipline's future (Research)

- Donor funding drying up
- Reduced government spending
- Contribution to policy





# The discipline's future (Policy)

- Agriculture's task to generate 1 million jobs
- Pressure to speed up land reform
- Continued domination of HBUs

