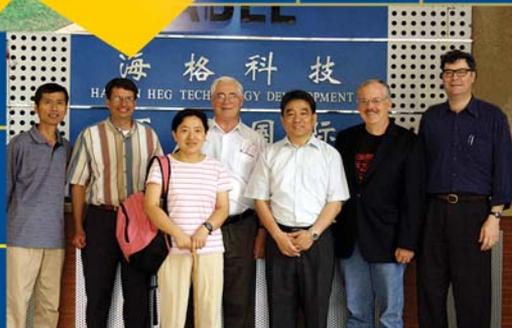


The Roles of Economists

in the U.S. Department of Agriculture



U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Among the many responsibilities of USDA are implementing the Food Stamp Program and other food and nutrition assistance programs; managing Federal forest land; implementing standards of humane care and treatment of animals; providing incentives for adopting wildlife habitat enhancements and other conservation practices; participating in trade negotiations; ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and eggs; providing funds for rural business development; and implementing farm programs legislated by Congress. The Department has a broad mandate, and virtually everything with which it is charged has economic dimensions. It is not surprising, then, that USDA employs over 800 economists across 16 of its agencies.

Roles of Economists

- USDA's chief economist provides direct economic guidance and advice to the Secretary of Agriculture and subcabinet officials of the Department, often in immediate or very quick turnaround situations.
- The economists employed by USDA agencies that implement programs examine the efficiency of those programs, conduct cost-benefit analyses, provide analysis to decisionmakers who allocate scarce budget resources, help set program parameters, and develop economic outlook and projections of market or other phenomena critical to agency operations.
- Economists in research agencies and units perform longer term, largely applied economic research on issues that inform decisions made within USDA, with findings also disseminated to audiences with a stake in those decisions or an academic interest in the economic findings, data, or approach.
- The work of USDA economists is presented to Members of Congress, State and local governments, businesses, and the general public. The objective information and analytical findings also attract the attention of major media.

- USDA economists come from a wide range of backgrounds. They may be employed strictly as “economists” or in a variety of other positions, including research social scientists, food program specialists, management or program analysts, research foresters, budget analysts, and risk management specialists. Most USDA economists have degrees in economics or economic specialties, but some hold degrees in such disciplines as public policy, political science, demography, regional science, or statistics. There are USDA economist positions held by recipients of terminal degrees at the bachelor’s, master’s, and Ph.D. levels. Economists at USDA may work mainly with other economists; with biologists, foresters, food scientists, or other interdisciplinary partners; with university counterparts; and/or directly with policy decisionmakers.

“The analytical work of economists is indispensable to USDA’s understanding of commodity market fundamentals. Monthly contributions to the Department’s flagship World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report have helped make this report one of the most respected sources of information used globally by commodity markets for price discovery.”

Gerald Bange,
World Agricultural Outlook Board, OCE

USDA economists

Agency/Office	Number*	Grade	Education		
			Bachelor's	Master's	Ph.D
Agricultural Marketing Service	52	GS11-15	■	■	■
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service	20	GS9-15	■	■	■
Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion	2	GS13-14			■
Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service	4	GS15-SES			■
Economic Research Service	280	GS9-SES		■	■
Farm Service Agency	50	GS13-SES		■	■
Food and Nutrition Service	40	GS9-15	■	■	■
Food Safety and Inspection Service	5	GS13-14		■	■
Foreign Agricultural Service	200	GS7-15	■	■	■
Forest Service	40	GS11-15	■	■	■
Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration	15	GS13-15		■	■
Natural Resources Conservation Service	45	GS12-15		■	■
Office of Budget and Program Analysis	8	GS9-SES		■	■
Office of the Chief Economist	29	GS12-SL-SES		■	■
Risk Management Agency	10	GS12-14	■	■	■
Rural Development	25	GS12-15	■	■	■

Not all USDA agencies are represented above, as not all agencies hire economists.

*Numbers are approximate and based on data collected in summer 2008. SES = Senior Executive Service. SL = Senior Level.

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

Mission

To facilitate the strategic marketing of agricultural products in domestic and international markets, while ensuring fair trading practices and promoting a competitive and efficient marketplace to the benefit of producers, traders, and consumers of U.S. food and fiber products

Roles of Economists

- Analyze the economic impacts of policies and regulations affecting marketing and trade of cotton, dairy, fruit, vegetables, livestock, meat, seed, poultry, eggs, and tobacco
- Analyze market conditions to inform policy decisions regarding procurement for the National School Lunch Program and other Federal food and nutrition assistance programs
- Research commodity distribution, logistics, packaging, and wholesale market development to enhance food supply chain efficiency and facilitate the distribution of U.S. agricultural products
- Collect and publish information on transportation costs for shipping commodities by rail, barge, and truck, which helps policymakers and industry participants understand the impact of exports and market competition
- Provide situation reports on market conditions and transportation costs to USDA leadership and others during natural disasters, labor strikes, and other market disruptions

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, marketing specialists, and agricultural economists

For more information about AMS, visit www.ams.usda.gov.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Mission

To provide leadership in ensuring the health and care of animals and plants and to improve agricultural productivity and competitiveness and contribute to the national economy and the public health

Roles of Economists

- Perform cost-benefit analyses of proposed regulations pertaining to U.S. agricultural health and genetically engineered organisms
- Evaluate the proposed regulations' impacts on small businesses
- Perform economic analyses for specific animal and plant-related projects to report to the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs and Congress

Positions Held by Economists

Economists

For more information about APHIS, visit www.aphis.usda.gov.



Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)

Mission

To improve the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links scientific research to the nutritional needs of consumers

Roles of Economists

- Produce the USDA Food Plans, which estimate the costs of a healthful diet for households and provide the basis for maximum food stamp allotments, the Basic Allowance for Subsistence for members of the armed services, and an estimate of the portion of a bankruptee's income to allocate to necessary food expenses
- Estimate the cost of raising children from birth through age 17 for major budgetary components; States use this information to set child support guidelines and foster care payments

Positions Held by Economists

Economists

For more information about CNPP, visit www.cnpp.usda.gov.



Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES)

Mission

To advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities through national program leadership and Federal assistance

Roles of Economists

- Determine how to allocate grant money to formula-funded programs (land-grant universities) and competitive programs (colleges and some small agribusinesses) by conducting institutional and programmatic reviews, managing proposal panels, and prioritizing funding objectives
- Prepare Requests for Applications for competitive funding, review and approve funding proposals and awards for competitive, formula, and congressionally earmarked projects; provide guidance to support academic research, teaching, and outreach; and assess and evaluate funded projects and programs
- Bring the attention of the agricultural economics community to the full spectrum of CSREES grant programs
- Foster the development of multistate committees of interdisciplinary professionals who address significant challenges in agriculture

Positions Held by Economists

Economists

For more information about CSREES, visit www.csrees.usda.gov.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Mission

To anticipate economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development, and conduct economic research that broadly and specifically informs public program and policy decisions

Roles of Economists

- Conduct economic research, analyze food and commodity markets, and produce policy studies
- Serve as the primary source of economic information and research for the Department
- Create and maintain databases and release market outlook reports on farm conditions and specific commodities
- Produce statistical information used by a broad audience, including the media, trade associations, securities analysts, public interest groups, and the general public
- Publish peer-reviewed research in economic research reports and journals, ERS's *Amber Waves* magazine, and on the ERS Web site

Positions Held by Economists

Economists

For more information about ERS, visit www.ers.usda.gov.

“Working at ERS provides me with opportunities to contribute to both academic and policy discussions. I know that when I write an ERS report, it’s going to be read.”

Shelly Ver Ploeg, ERS

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Mission

To equitably serve all farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners through the delivery of effective, efficient agricultural programs for all Americans

Roles of Economists

- Analyze farm commodity, credit, conservation, bioenergy, disaster, and loan programs to improve economic stability in the agricultural industry
- Prepare cost-benefit analyses and risk assessments for proposed changes for the FSA Administrator, Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, and Secretary of Agriculture for use in policymaking decisions
- Forecast commodity supply and use, farm prices, Commodity Credit Corporation loan activity and outlays, and Conservation Reserve Program enrollment and outlays for the President's budget

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, program analysts, program managers, and agricultural marketing specialists

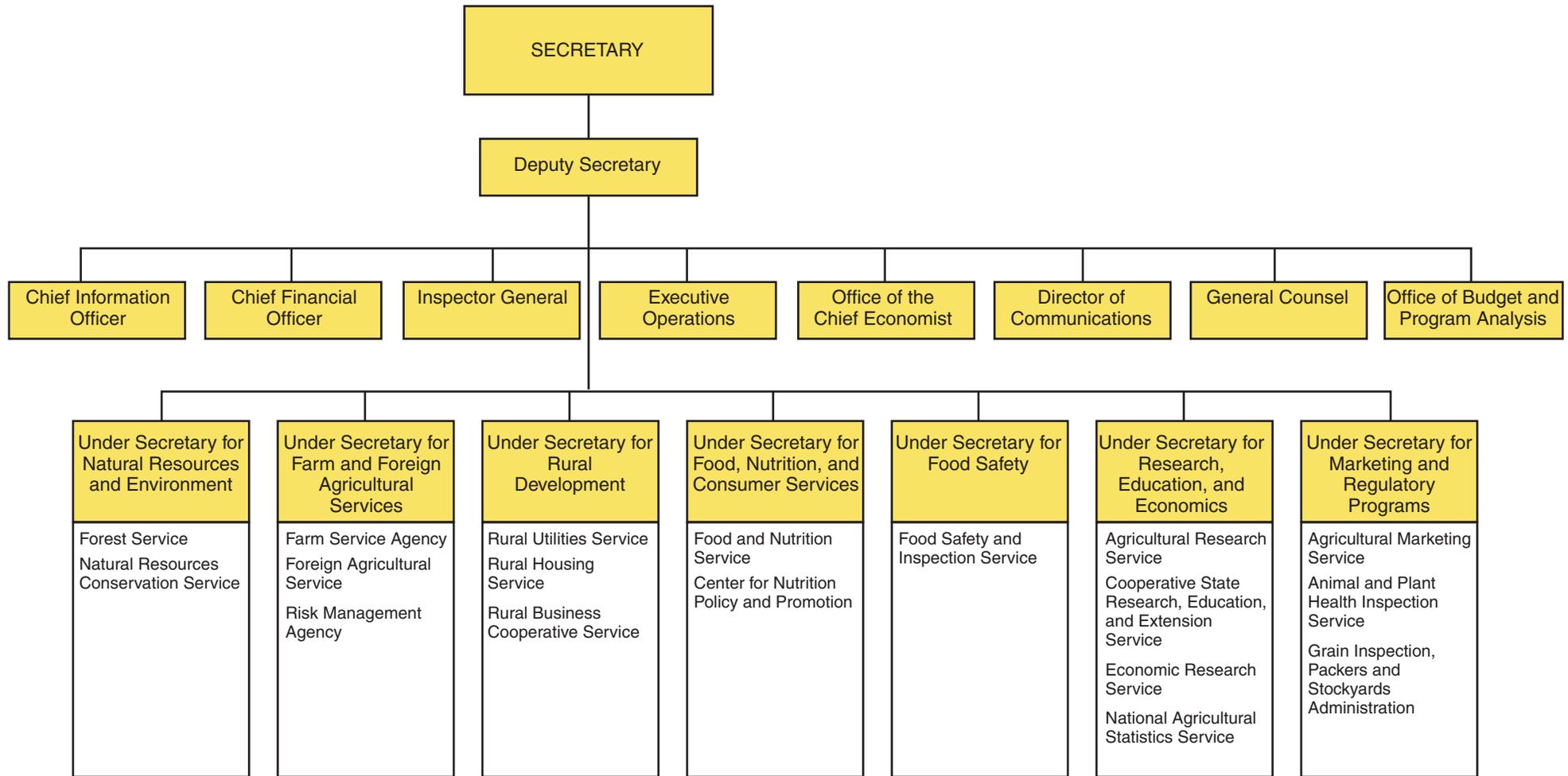
For more information about FSA, visit www.fsa.usda.gov.



"Applied economics takes on a different meaning when you're given less than a day to turn policy on assumptions that changed the day before."

Steve Gill, FSA

United States Department of Agriculture
Organization Chart



Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)

Mission

To provide children and needy families better access to food and a more healthful diet through food and nutrition assistance programs and comprehensive nutrition education efforts

Roles of Economists

- Analyze the impacts of proposed legislative changes to a variety of food and nutrition assistance programs
- Publish research reports on program-related issues to inform USDA policy officials and the advocate community
- Provide general technical assistance to State partners, which administer the programs

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, research social scientists, food program specialists, program analysts, and budget analysts

For more information about FNS, visit www.fns.usda.gov.



“Virtually every day I apply my skills knowing that my analyses will inform policy decisions and have an impact on the nutrition assistance provided to those in need.”

Bob Dalrymple, FNS

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

Mission

To ensure that the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and processed egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged

Roles of Economists

- Perform cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analyses for policies designed to ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and processed egg products
- Evaluate the impact on small businesses of proposed changes to food safety regulations and policy alternatives

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, management and program analysts, and food technologists

For more information about FSIS, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.



Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Mission

To create economic opportunity for U.S. agriculture by expanding global markets

Roles of Economists

- Develop, maintain, and analyze USDA's agricultural production, supply, and demand data
- Analyze key countries and regions to develop strategies for international agricultural trade policy and evaluate and monitor trade agreements, including World Trade Organization negotiations and agreements
- Analyze the costs of technical, sanitary, and phytosanitary barriers to trade
- Analyze market development programs, export credit guarantees, and import programs for sugar, dairy, and trade adjustment assistance
- Partner with the U.S. Agency for International Development to evaluate food aid programs; trade, science, and regulatory capacity building projects; and post-conflict, post-disaster reconstruction efforts

Positions Held by Economists

Agricultural and international economists, management and program analysts, international trade specialists, and agricultural marketing specialists

For more information about FAS, visit www.fas.usda.gov.

Forest Service (FS)

Mission

To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations

Roles of Economists

- Analyze forest management and forest policy topics, including forest values, forest product markets, and wildland fire
- Publish peer-reviewed research in scientific journals, FS technical science series, and nontechnical outlets
- Provide economic support for national forest planning and project analyses, environmental impact assessments, and planning appeals
- Conduct economic analysis required for programmatic planning and regulatory actions

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, social scientists, foresters, research economists, and research foresters

For more information about FS, visit www.fs.fed.us.



Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

Mission

To facilitate the marketing of livestock, poultry, meat, cereals, oilseeds, and related agricultural products, and promote fair and competitive trading practices for the overall benefit of consumers and U.S. agriculture

Roles of Economists

- Analyze the structure and nature of competition in the livestock, meat, and poultry industries to enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921
- Evaluate the effects of existing and proposed Federal legislation on the livestock, meat, and poultry industries
- Monitor and analyze livestock prices and other market trends
- Participate in investigations of the marketing and procurement practices of regulated firms
- Provide analyses and data that help regulate the livestock, meat, and poultry industries

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, agricultural economists, budget analysts, and grain marketing specialists

For more information about GIPSA, visit www.gipsa.usda.gov.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Mission

To provide products and services that enable people to be good stewards of their soil, water, and related natural resources

Roles of Economists

- Conduct cost-benefit analyses of proposed changes to regulations pertaining to soil, water, and other natural resources and conservation programs, which are submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for approval and recorded in the *Federal Register* as regulatory impact analyses
- Develop and publish economic and technical information to assist landowners, communities, units of State and local government, and Federal agencies in planning and implementing conservation systems
- Foster communication between the State offices, three national technology support centers, and national headquarters through an active economist discussion forum and Web presentation
- Assist State offices in the construction of practice payment schedules, partial budgeting to determine the economics of conservation practices, and special projects (such as analysis of cost-effectiveness of certain programs and/or practices)

Positions Held by Economists

Economists and management and program analysts

For more information about NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

Mission

To provide analyses and information to the Office of the Secretary and other policy officials to support informed decisionmaking regarding the Department's programs, policies, budget, legislative proposals, and regulatory actions

Roles of Economists

- Review and analyze USDA agency-level budget proposals and assist in developing the Department's annual budget request that is submitted to OMB and Congress
- Review programs and policies as well as legislative proposals and evaluate alternatives and budgetary implications
- Help initiate and review economic analyses, such as regulatory impact analyses that are required for significant regulations affecting USDA programs
- Assist in the implementation of the Performance Improvement Initiative, including using the Program Assessment Rating Tool to assess program performance and evaluating agency performance measures

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, program analysts, and budget analysts

For more information about OBPA, visit www.obpa.usda.gov.

"Budgeting is classic economics in that it is done to allocate scarce resources among competing uses to achieve desired outcomes."

Scott Steele, OBPA

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

Mission

To advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the economic prospects in agricultural markets and the economic implications of policies, programs, and economic events affecting U.S. agriculture, rural communities, and forestry; to ensure the public has consistent, objective, and reliable agricultural forecasts and projections; to promote effective and efficient rules governing Departmental programs; to coordinate global change program issues; and to conduct research on and coordinate energy issues related to agriculture

Roles of Economists

- Advise the Secretary, testify before Congress, and produce internal reports about the implications of policies affecting the U.S. food and fiber system and rural areas
- Analyze energy markets and climate change and perform risk assessments and cost-benefit analyses of proposed regulatory actions
- Coordinate, review, and approve USDA's commodity forecasts, incorporating the meteorological impact on crops detailed in the inhouse Joint Agricultural Weather Facility's reports; these forecasts are published in the monthly World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates reports, which predict supply and demand for U.S. and global crops and U.S. livestock and are used by agribusinesses, commodity traders, farmers, and the press

Positions Held by Economists

Economists and program analysts

For more information about OCE, visit www.usda.gov/oce

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Mission

To promote, support, and regulate sound risk management solutions to preserve and strengthen the economic stability of America's agricultural producers

Roles of Economists

- Calculate crop prices to use in estimating prices needed to guarantee crops for the inhouse Federal Crop Insurance Corporation
- Perform statistical and risk management analyses to help determine insurance premium rates for over 100 crops throughout the country

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, risk management specialists, and statisticians

For more information about RMA, visit www.rma.usda.gov.



Rural Development (RD)

Mission

To increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans

Roles of Economists

- Engage in development planning for, provide technical business advisory assistance to, and research issues affecting rural businesses and cooperatives
- Perform grant and loan analysis and engage in a variety of outreach and educational activities
- Evaluate rural business and cooperative, housing, and utilities programs and participate in the use of the program assessment rating tool as required by OMB to ensure performance-based budgeting
- Contribute articles to *Rural Cooperatives* magazine and other publications

Positions Held by Economists

Economists, program analysts, and agricultural marketing specialists

For more information about RD, visit www.rurdev.usda.gov.

“USDA provides opportunities to work in a variety of areas, from food and nutrition to forestry to international trade. I have been able to adapt to changing environments because my degree in agricultural economics provided me a range of skills that always seem in demand.”

Jim Jacobs, RD

Careers at USDA

Employment at USDA offers a stimulating intellectual environment with great potential for personal and professional growth. Our staff includes professionals trained in economics who work on timely, policy-relevant research topics as economists, management and program analysts, budget analysts, and marketing specialists. These individuals collaborate with coworkers from diverse backgrounds and interact with other professionals through team projects, seminars, and joint efforts with peers in academia, outside institutions, and other Government agencies.

USDA economists disseminate research results in a broad portfolio of high-quality publications, in print and on our Web site. Some economists also publish in respected peer-reviewed academic journals, further enhancing their professional credentials.

As a member of the USDA team, you'll find satisfaction in conducting independent and collaborative work on issues that matter, and a challenging environment in which to continue your professional career.

Job announcements are published on USAJobs at www.usajobs.com, on the USDA Web site at www.usda.gov, and on the various USDA agency Web sites.

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