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Agricultural Economics Training at the University of Sydney

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Although the B.Agr.Ec. degree at the University of Sydney has only existed since the early 1980s, training in agricultural economics has been available at Sydney University for over thirty years. Before the introduction of the B.Agr.Ec. degree, agricultural economics was taught as a stream within the B.Sc.Agr. curriculum. This necessarily imposed constraints on the curriculum in agricultural economics and it was necessary for agricultural economists trained at the University of Sydney to attend courses in a range of scientific disciplines. The opportunity cost was a reduction in the amount of applied economics that could be taught.

To overcome this perceived problem, a new curriculum for the B.Agr.Ec. degree was introduced in 1987 in which students have a range of options in a series of fields. With this structure it is no longer necessary to undertake scientific training in agriculture in order to obtain the B.Agr.Ec. degree. In the first year of their degree students complete the core courses Agricultural Economics I, Economics I and Econometrics I and then choose one of Accounting I, Biology, Government I, Commercial Law I or The Australian Economy. In second and subsequent years it is possible for students to pursue an accounting/law, government/public administration, agricultural science, or econometrics specialty or to train more intensively in a field of economics while completing core subjects in agricultural economics and economics.

The aim in providing this flexibility within the B.Agr.Ec. degree has been to meet the strong demand for an applied economics degree with the possibility of completing business oriented subjects. In the first two years of the new degree

structure only 10 per cent of students have opted to take biology in first year, an option which would normally lead into courses in animal science and agronomy. The attractiveness of the present degree structure to students is further illustrated by the increase in numbers (over 100 per cent over the period 1986 to 1988) that has occurred.

In addition to offering a B.Agr.Ec. degree, the University of Sydney continues to offer an agricultural economics major in both the B.Ec. and the B.Sc.Agr. degrees. Numbers entering the major in the B.Sc.Agr. have been low historically although in recent years demand has increased in line with the situation in the job market for agricultural scientists. For much the same reason, an increase in demand for postgraduate diplomas in agricultural economics has also been observed in recent years.

The present strong positive trend in demand for agricultural economics training is expected to continue for the next three to five years. Because of the diversity of training offered within the B.Agr.Ec. degree, it is unlikely that major difficulties will be encountered by agricultural economics graduates in the job market.