



# Census 2017: An overview of commercial agriculture

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**T**he statistician-general and head of Statistics South Africa, or Stats SA, Risenga Maluleke, released the results of the Census of Commercial Agriculture (CoCA) 2017 in March this year. The general objective of the CoCA 2017 was to collect basic quantitative information on commercial agriculture in South Africa, which is essential for policy formulation and food security.

## Farm income

The total income for the commercial agricultural industry in 2017 was R332,8 billion, which is significantly higher than the R85,9 billion recorded for 2007.

According to the CoCA 2017, there were 40 122 commercial farms in 2017. Farms with an annual income of more than R22,5 million constituted 6,5% of the total number of farms in commercial agriculture. These 2 610 farms accounted

for 67% of total income and 51,4% of total employment.

Microfarms with an annual income below R1 million made up nearly half of the total number of farms (18 710), but only accounted for 1,9% of total income and 6% of total employment.

## Gross farming income

The gross farming income derived directly from agricultural activities totalled R294,8 billion and consisted of animals and animal products (52,2%), horticulture (23,9%) and field crops (23,4%). Based on the number of farms recorded and the gross farming income of 2017, the average income per farm was R7,3 million.

Most farming enterprises farmed animals in 2017 (33,9%). These farms also reported the highest share of income (36,2%) compared to other farming spheres. Mixed farming took up 31,1% of the total number of farms and 28,6% of income.

Horticulture reported the highest percentage of income at 35,5%, but only had a share of 11,6% of the total number of recorded farms. In 2017, livestock farming, mixed farming and horticulture brought in R120,8 billion, R95 billion and R65,7 billion, respectively.

The Free State reported the highest number of farms in 2017 (7 951), followed by the Western Cape (6 937), North West (4 290), the Northern Cape (4 829), Gauteng (2 291), Mpumalanga (2 823) and Limpopo (3 054).

Although the Western Cape ranked second in terms of the number of farms, it made the highest contribution to the commercial agricultural sector's total income in 2017. The province brought in R64,3 billion, followed by the Free State (R46,9 billion), North West (R39,7 billion), Mpumalanga (R38,4 billion) and KwaZulu-Natal (R34 billion).

Table 1: Land use by province as at 30 September 2018.

Province	Total		Arable land		Grazing land		Other land	
	Hectares	% contribution	Hectares	% contribution	Hectares	% contribution	Hectares	% contribution
Western Cape	4 098 779	8,8	1 003 642	13,2	2 738 371	7,5	356 765	15,7
Eastern Cape	5 713 528	12,3	357 810	4,7	5 266 438	14,4	89 278	3,9
Northern Cape	17 229 260	37,1	671 400	8,8	16 358 215	44,8	199 643	8,8
Free State	7 636 020	16,4	2 454 122	32,2	5 161 833	14,1	20 062	0,9
KwaZulu-Natal	1 843 926	4	524 053	6,9	917 312	2,5	402 559	17,7
North West	5 323 682	11,5	1 118 509	14,7	3 474 878	9,5	730 294	32,2
Gauteng	385 317	0,8	180 349	2,4	197 878	0,5	7 088	0,3
Mpumalanga	2 467 007	5,3	943 163	12,4	1 177 535	3,2	346 307	15,3
Limpopo	1 722 938	3,7	361 341	4,7	1 244 477	3,4	117 119	5,2
South Africa	46 420 458	100	7 614 392	100	36 536 940	100	2 269 115	100

Table 2: Field crops: Area planted and production in 2007 and 2017.

Type of crop	Planted hectares						Production in metric tons					
	Total		Dry land		Irrigated		Total		Dry land		Irrigated	
	2007	2017	2007	2017	2007	2017	2007	2017	2007	2017	2007	2017
Maize	2 156 766	2 173 371	1 952 218	1 943 828	204 548	229 542	7 373 033	10 801 025	6 034 723	8 824 995	1 338 308	1 976 030
Soya beans	107 124	470 169	93 895	440 372	13 228	29 796	177 765	842 549	143 378	753 428	34 386	89 121
Sunflower seeds	241 187	355 660	231 081	352 992	10 105	2 667	296 524	555 994	278 522	549 977	18 002	6 017
Wheat	563 888	325 909	470 497	237 974	93 390	87 935	1 603 872	1 011 704	1 125 491	577 692	478 381	434 012
Sugarcane	267 604	186 483	206 382	149 581	61 221	149 581	15 710 713	7 534 550	10 933 078	5 002 579	4 777 634	2 531 970

## Employment

The CoCA 2017 report indicates that employment within commercial agriculture declined compared to employment levels in 2007. The total number of people employed within the sector on 30 June 2018 was 757 628, which is 11 966 or 1,6% fewer people compared to recorded totals in 2007. While an unfortunate fact and given that agriculture is one of the major creators of jobs in South Africa, this is a reflection of the general employment trend in the country.

South Africans employed in horticulture (268 740 people) made up most of the major commercial agricultural activity in 2017, followed by mixed farming (185 863 people) and farming of animals (162 116 people).

The Western Cape employed the most people within the commercial agricultural sector (186 997 people), followed by Limpopo (97 478 people) and KwaZulu-Natal (96 206 people). Gauteng and the

North West province had the lowest employment levels within the commercial agricultural sector, with 36 517 and 57 758 people, respectively.

## Commercial agricultural land use

According to the survey, 37,9% of the total land area of South Africa (122,5 million hectares) was used for commercial agriculture, which totals 46,4 million hectares.

Commercial agricultural land mainly consisted of grazing land (36,5 million hectares), which is used for game and livestock farming, and arable land (7,6 million hectares), used for crop production. The Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and Free state accounted for 73% of grazing land. The Free State, North West, Western Cape and Mpumalanga accounted for 72,5% of arable land.

Ultimately, the largest share of the country's commercial agricultural land is located in the Northern Cape (37,1%),

followed by the Free State (16,4%), the Eastern Cape (12,3%) and North West (11,5%). Gauteng (0,8%) and Limpopo (3,7%) recorded the smallest shares.

## Field crops

Field crops account for the largest portion of cultivated land in South Africa. In terms of area planted, the major field crops in both 2007 and 2017 were maize, soya beans, sunflower seeds, wheat and sugarcane. Between 2007 and 2017, the area planted increased in three cases, namely maize, soya beans and sunflower seeds.

All major field crops were mostly planted under dry land. In 2017, sunflower seeds had the highest proportion (99,2%) planted under dry land, followed by soya beans (93,7%), maize (89,4%), sugarcane (80,2%) and wheat (73%). 🌱

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