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USDA
FOREIGN
AGRICULTURAL
SERVICE

GUIDE TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER SELECTION PROCESS

Office of Foreign Service Operations

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Section I

The Foreign Service

The United States Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is one of the U.S. Government's four Foreign Affairs Agencies under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. Chartered in 1953, FAS is a small agency with a global mission and presence. FAS is responsible for a broad range of programs, activities and tasks designed to carry out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's statutory responsibility to promote U.S. agricultural interests overseas. The core mission of FAS is to facilitate trade and international cooperation, which are critical to the vitality of the U.S. agricultural sector. Staff includes about 850 people stationed in Washington, about 160 Foreign Agricultural Affairs Officers, and 350 locally employed staff overseas. Foreign Service officers represent the interests and needs of American agriculture at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad.

If you are interested in a Foreign Service career at FAS, there is plenty of opportunity, but entry is a competitive process that takes place only once every 12-24 months depending on the needs of the service.

Is the Foreign Service right for you?

By joining the Foreign Service you will have opportunities to live in exotic places, to experience foreign cultures, to participate in making history, and to make friends all over the world. This lifestyle is not for everyone. Exotic places can expose you to exotic diseases and history in the making can be hazardous. A lot of posts are in smoggy, over-populated urban areas. You will be expected to spend two-thirds of your career overseas, moving every three or four years, and your family may not always be able to go with you. This State Department quiz may help you to decide if this is the right career choice for you at <http://careers.state.gov/officer/is-the-foreign-service-right-for-you/>.

What does a Foreign Service Officer in the Foreign Agricultural Service Do?

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is unique within the U.S. government for its sole focus on global food and agricultural trade and food security issues. Foreign Service officers are posted across the globe, allowing FAS to address trade policy and market development issues as they arise. They are the front-line professionals representing the Department of Agriculture in 96 overseas field offices in U.S. diplomatic missions covering 169 countries. They can be sent anywhere in the world, at any time, to serve the diplomatic needs of the United States.

A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Josh Emmanuel Lagos

Every morning, parading through neighborhood alleyways on a rusty bicycle, a local merchant sings in Hindi that he is available to purchase unwanted household items. Like clockwork, his voice is a daily reminder that it is time to get out of bed. While sipping my morning coffee, outside my window green parrots flutter between trees, and a large hawk soars beneath a hazy sky. And if luck would have it, the local resident cow may find herself strolling by my apartment, lazily searching for the closest feeding station, often voluntarily stocked with food by a local caretaker. Although heavy traffic is a constant challenge in New Delhi, while riding to work I always enjoy watching the city emerge from its deep slumber. Temples of worship are bustling with flower merchants selling strings of marigolds for the devoted, and women are adorned with vibrant saris or the fashionable salwar kameez. Tiny streets and markets are packed with people from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, each individually expressing himself through nuanced bodily expression, dress, and jewelry. It is then that I realize how little I know, and how much I need to learn.

In my experience, the greatest challenge and enjoyment of being an Agricultural Attaché is learning about the country, which includes not only its current political-economic and agricultural situation, but its history, religion, culture, food, and most important the people who live within its borders. I have found that during both of my assignments abroad, it is nearly impossible to understand a foreign government's political or economic policy if one does not understand the country context. With this knowledge, you are able to tackle challenges both large and small, and effectively address important issues ranging from food security to trade. But perhaps of greater value is that such knowledge allows you to bridge interests, diplomatically resolve impasse, and foster tangible results.

Learning also means understanding how a U.S. Embassy operates. One of the first things you may notice is that the bureaucracy is smaller. For example, it's easier to hold interagency meetings since most USG Departments or agencies are located in the same building. This allows for more collaboration on crosscutting issues. Moreover, Embassy work affords one the opportunity to be a leader, manager, and an expert. During your tour, you likely will find yourself providing facts, analysis, and opinion directly to decision-makers. You also will manage locally-employed staff, providing them your vision on reporting and other assignments.

As an Agricultural Attaché, you have a wide range of responsibilities, including analysis, marketing, trade policy, and agricultural development. The backbone of FAS is information gathering and analysis, which is a major component of your job overseas. For reporting, you will travel and interview various actors to understand agricultural trends such as production, consumption, stocks, and trade. Your reporting helps US farmers and exporters understand foreign markets, but it also contributes to the policy decision-making process in USDA. For the marketing of US foods, you may work with US cooperators and local retailers, traders, and distributors to organize in-store promotions, reverse trade missions, and chef trainings. Agricultural trade policy can include addressing tariff issues, but has incrementally shifted to resolving nontariff barriers such as sanitary and phytosanitary measures. Moreover, you may help organize agricultural development activities ranging from scientist exchanges, food aid programming, market capacity building, and other trainings to improve food security and trade.

Outside of work, you are constantly learning how to live abroad, which requires a certain amount of flexibility, openness, and curiosity. This can include learning how to keenly negotiate without raising your blood pressure, or deftly cross a street without being plummeted by vehicles, animals, and carefree pedestrians. You may discover that your interpretations of "history" are not the same as your



neighbor's, and as a result have long philosophical conversations on the subject. And that Tex-Mex food can never be replicated outside of Texas (which is true). In effect, you always are the teacher and student, which is a never-ending rollercoaster of intercultural excitement.

About the Attaché: In 2005, Mr. Joshua Emmanuel Lagos started working for FAS as a civil servant employee, joining the Foreign Service in 2007. Prior to his current posting in New Delhi, India he was posted in Beijing, China. Joshua grew up in San Antonio, Texas and received his undergraduate education from the University of Texas at Austin, where he graduated with three degrees: Latin American Studies, History, and Communication Studies. He received a Master's of Arts in International Affairs from American University.

A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Robert Thomson Wright

There is no standard answer to the question “what is a typical day like for an Agricultural Attaché?” Every day and every post are different. Foreign Service life is eclectic and diverse. We are generalists. As agricultural officers we are diplomats, economists, statisticians and agronomists. We are also managers, public speakers, and trade policy specialists. We are equally at ease holding an impromptu meeting in the middle of a rice paddy or discussing foreign policy with ambassadors, heads of state, and business leaders at receptions and formal dinners. On any given day, an Agricultural Attaché's schedule might require him to brief an incoming business delegation, interview a trader, brief the ambassador and embassy country team, or attend a reception hosted by a local business council.

Agricultural Attachés spend extensive time in the field. Our agency places high importance on data collection and on the ground verification of international commodity production, supply and demand estimates. While it is not uncommon for Attachés to spend 25 percent of their time on the road, some officers cover multiple countries and may spend as much as two thirds of their time travelling. During these trips, we meet with farmers, traders, and researchers to develop an estimate of a country's production of a given commodity, and what they are likely to import or export in a given year. These figures are made freely available to the public, and are considered by foreign governments and international businesses as the gold standard for publicly available, unbiased agricultural commodity reporting. This information is used to inform markets, help form agricultural policy, minimize supply disruptions, and to prevent dramatic price fluctuations.

Inside the embassy, we play a prominent role in the country team, providing the unique perspective that we bring both as agriculturalists and as officers who are well acquainted with the rural corners of our country. For example, after recently returning from several days on the road, my first task was to brief the ambassador and country team on the status of the country's major export commodity. The embassy's political and economic officers followed up with several questions, given agriculture's significant contribution to the country's GDP and the role agricultural policy plays in local politics. In addition to informing the country team, we also reported our findings via USDA's Global Agricultural Information Network and the State Department's cable reporting system. Popular GAIN reports can receive thousands of hits, predominantly from the international business community. Colleagues from the State Department and the U.S. Trade Representative's Office are frequent and avid readers of our cables on issues such as trade, the environment, and animal disease outbreaks like avian influenza.

Outside of reporting, we work diligently to advise U.S. exporters. On a given day, I have led a breakfast meeting with a group of new-to-market exporters, helped an importer release a container of U.S. food products from customs, and followed up email enquiries from businesses in the U.S. seeking potential clients for their products. About twice a year, (or more, depending on the country), we organize U.S. delegations to participate in major trade shows in country. It is common to attend multiple evening functions every week, representing USDA at receptions hosted by exporter organizations, chambers of commerce, and neighboring embassies. Our role in these events is to build our contact network amongst industry leaders, inform ourselves on the current status of a particular market, and to deliver remarks to the groups ranging from tens to hundreds of people. We are frequently called on to speak about the U.S. position on a particular trade issue, or to explain the status of U.S. agricultural policy.

One of our most important jobs is advocating for improved market access. This work often involves educating host country officials on U.S. regulations and agricultural practices. In other instances, advocacy involves encouraging foreign governments to abide by their commitments to the World Trade Organization. When appropriate, we fund outreach activities to foreign policy makers. In the last month, I developed a biotechnology policy workshop with a local agricultural university and wrote a grant request to fund the activity. In the same period I also submitted a grant proposal to USDA's Emerging Market Program requesting funds for foreign officials to audit the U.S. food safety system and regulatory framework. If the audit is successful, the officials will sufficiently understand U.S. food safety regulations and declare our food safety system "equivalent" to their own, thus opening the market to a wide variety of U.S. meat products.

Life as an Agricultural Attaché is exciting and unique. Through my work I have seen the world, discovered things I never knew existed, and learned that in spite of globalization, cultures and perspectives are truly diverse. I have become a pro at public speaking, and have had the opportunity to work in a multi-cultural interdisciplinary team that is packed full of bright minds. Perhaps the best thing to keep in mind is that we have the opportunity to make what we want of our careers. If you want room to grow, be a leader, and chart your own course, there are opportunities in the Foreign Service. We have the best jobs in the embassy.

About the Attaché: Thom Wright is the Attaché for Agricultural Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. Mr. Wright joined USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service in 2006 as an Agricultural Economist covering agricultural trade barriers related to avian influenza and other animal diseases. He has also worked as an analyst in the USDA's Office of Global Analysis, forecasting global wheat trade. Prior to joining FAS, Mr. Wright was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Gabon and also worked for a private humanitarian organization in France. In addition to his work in Indonesia, Mr. Wright has served USDA in India and South Africa.

Mr. Wright earned an M.S. in Agricultural Economics from Michigan State University and a Bachelor's degree in French from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. He speaks French and grew up in Tacoma, Washington.

Section II

The Foreign Service Officer Selection Process

Requirements

- Possess at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-9 level in Federal service or completion of at least three full years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a Ph.D. degree in marketing, economics, agricultural economics, agricultural business or other field of study directly related to this position from an accredited university.
- To be eligible for consideration, the applicant must meet specialized experience and/or education requirements no later than September 1, 2014.
- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be available for a worldwide assignment and willing to relocate approximately every 3-4 years.
- Be able to pass a U.S. Government background check and obtain and maintain a top secret security clearance (costs covered by FAS).
- Be able to obtain and maintain medical clearance.

How to apply

1. Complete the online application package.

To begin this process, create an account in USAJOBS (<https://my.usajobs.gov/>). Search Jobs by typing ***“Foreign Agricultural Affairs Officer”*** in ***“Washington DC.”*** View the job you have selected and then click ***“Apply Online.”*** Applicants must complete an online application for an announced vacancy by the closing date of the announcement. This job requires a USAJOBS resume to apply. The resume must contain the following information: 1) job information for which you are applying; 2) personal information; 3) education; 4) work experience; and 5) other qualifications. After submitting your resume, follow the prompts to complete the occupational questionnaire. **Applications are not screened for required documents. It is your responsibility to ensure that all required documents are received by the closing date of the announcement.** If you are unable to apply online, you may fax your application materials to the fax number stated on the announcement.

2. The selection process

Applications will be screened to determine if the basic qualifications specified in the announcement have been met. Applications that pass through this first screening are rated and rank ordered, relative to the qualifications specified in the announcement. The highest ranking applicants are invited to participate in the Foreign Agricultural Service Assessment held in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Applicants will be notified by email if they have passed this first stage. **FAS will not pay any travel costs.**



The Assessment is divided into three parts: written, group, and oral examinations. The written exam is conducted first. Candidates that pass the written exam are invited back (usually 2-3 weeks later) for the group and oral exams. Those candidates who pass all three parts of the Assessment will be placed on a list called the Certificate of Eligibles. The Certificate is valid for a maximum of twenty-four months from the date certified by the Director General of the Office of Foreign Service Operations of FAS. Candidates who do not receive a conditional offer before the Certificate of Eligibles expires may reapply. Candidates who decline an offer are removed from the Certificate. The number of candidates who are selected for a conditional offer depends on funding availability and the needs of the service.

Written Examination:

You will have three hours to complete four (4) exercises similar to the kind of work you would be expected to perform with relatively little guidance as an Agricultural Attaché or an Agricultural Trade Officer overseas. The exercises include a narrative statement, a briefing memo, proofreading, and a data summary.

The main objective of the written assessment is to assess whether you have the basic writing, editing, and reasoning skills to perform Foreign Agricultural Service work. The exercises should demonstrate that you can write in concise, well-organized, grammatically correct, effective, and persuasive English in a limited amount of time.

Group Exercise:

Candidates are brought together in a group of four to six to constitute an Embassy task force charged with allocating resources to competing projects in their host country. Each candidate receives a package of common background materials, as well as a five-page candidate-specific project to read and absorb. At the end of that time, each candidate presents his or her project to the group. After the last presentation has been made, the group negotiates and debates pros and cons with the goal of reaching a consensus on which projects should be supported and at what level. Examiners observe the group to see how well individuals demonstrate the core skills and abilities, such as team work and negotiation that are essential in FAS Officers.

Oral Interview:

In this portion of the oral assessment, interviewers will assess your fitness for the Foreign Service and the experience and skills you would bring to a job in the Foreign Agricultural Service. You might think of the oral interview as the formal job interview. Topics may include the U.S. farm legislation and the farm bill, agricultural trade, market development, biotechnology, climate change, food aid and food security.

Worldwide Availability:

Worldwide availability is an essential requirement for appointment to the Foreign Service. Applicants must be available for worldwide assignment, including assignments at posts where health, living conditions, or medical support may be rudimentary, or in danger zones where family members are not allowed. Additionally, regardless of who administers the medical exam, the Department of State's Office of Medical Services determines whether or not a candidate is medically available for assignment



to FAS posts worldwide. Certain medical conditions that require monitoring or follow-up care, or are prone to exacerbation in certain overseas environments, may result in a finding of non-worldwide availability and thus disqualify a candidate from eligibility. In cases where medical problems lead to a denial of medical clearance, the candidate may request a waiver of the worldwide availability requirement. A decision to grant a waiver is made on a case-by-case basis and only if it is clearly in the best interests of the Foreign Service.

You will also be asked to reaffirm in writing that you accept the following two conditions of Foreign Service employment:

- First, support of U.S. Government policies and objectives, regardless of your personal views;
- Second, Worldwide Availability: Even though the Foreign Agricultural Service attempts to work with each employee's individual and family needs, all employees must be willing to serve anywhere that FAS determines to be necessary. This can mean in isolated, potentially unhealthy or dangerous environments, or where you might not have training in the local language. While you will have some input into the assignment process, everyone is expected to serve part of his or her career at hardship posts. FAS also has unaccompanied posts; if assigned to one, you would not be able to take family with you.

Medical Clearance

Those entering the Foreign Service must be able to serve at any overseas post. Many facilities are remote, unhealthy, or have limited medical support. Therefore, each candidate must meet medical fitness standards which are, of necessity, often more rigorous than those of other professions. Candidates who are offered tentative job offers are provided with instructions for obtaining their medical clearances. Candidates can either schedule exams at the Department of State's Office of Medical Service or have them done by their own physicians. The candidate's medical insurance should be used to cover the cost of the exam. FAS will pay any remaining costs after the candidate's medical insurer has paid its customary fee. While candidates must be medically cleared for full overseas duty, the Department of State no longer considers the medical condition of family members for pre-employment purposes. However, the Department of State still requires medical clearances for family members before they can travel overseas to accompany an employee on assignment at U.S. Government expense. Family members who, for medical reasons, cannot accompany an employee on an overseas assignment may be eligible to receive a separate maintenance allowance.

Security Clearance

A comprehensive security background investigation, conducted by the Office of Personnel Security in cooperation with other federal, state and local agencies, provides information necessary to both determine a candidate's suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and their eligibility for a Top Secret security clearance. The process considers such factors as: failure to repay a U.S. Government-guaranteed loan or meet tax obligations; failure to register for the Selective Service; past problems with credit or bankruptcy; unsatisfactory employment records; a criminal record or other violations of the law; drug or alcohol abuse; and less than an honorable discharge from the armed forces. Extensive travel, education, residence and/or employment overseas may extend the time it takes to obtain a clearance. Candidates who cannot be granted a security clearance are ineligible for appointment. Candidates who have held an active Top Secret security clearance with another U.S. federal agency within the past two years and whose last background investigation is no more than five years old may be

able to have their security clearances granted by USDA under the criteria of reciprocity. However, for the purposes of determining candidates' suitability, candidates whose background investigation is more than two years old still need to update their documentation to support an updated investigation.

3. The Skills Needed to be Successful in the Foreign Service

The Assessment is designed to test for skills, abilities and personal qualities which demonstrate whether the candidate possesses specific skills needed to perform successfully the job of a Foreign Agricultural Affairs Officer. The skills tested in the Assessment were determined after conducting a thorough job analysis. Specifically, these skills include:

- **Composure** – Staying calm, poised and effective in stressful or difficult situations is essential for Foreign Service officers who often need to think on their feet.
- **At Ease in Culturally Diverse Environments** – We value overseas experience as well as experience in the United States that has brought you in contact with people of different cultures, language and backgrounds.
- **Experience and Motivation** – It's important that applicants articulate the appropriate motivation for joining the Foreign Service.
- **Strong Analytical Skills** – Our stakeholders depend on FAS to provide market intelligence and coherent analysis that help U.S. agriculture compete in the global market place. Candidates should be able to identify, compile, analyze, and draw correct conclusions from pertinent data.
- **Writing and Speaking Skills** – Communication skills are central to carrying out our mission. Candidates need to be able to write and speak effectively and persuasively, and should be comfortable presenting information in a variety of settings and formats to a variety of audiences. FAS officers routinely work closely with locally employed staff and are called upon to polish writing from non-native English speakers.
- **Initiative and Leadership Skills** – FAS is the USDA's lead agency for international trade and exports. We have our sights set on identifying those who have the potential to lead as we carry out this heavy responsibility. The world is ever-changing, and so our agency must be able to adapt quickly, embrace change, and seize opportunities whenever and where ever they arise. We are looking for people who can come up with creative alternatives to resolving problems and show flexibility in response to unanticipated circumstances.
- **Judgment** – Employees must be able to discern what is appropriate, practical and realistic in a given situation.
- **Objectivity and Integrity** – Employees must be able to present issues frankly and fully, without letting personal bias prejudice actions.
- **Planning and Organizing Skills** – Resources are often limited and a systematic approach is needed to make sure we are achieving our objectives.

- **Teamwork Skills** –. Employees work with many different groups within the Agency, across the U.S. Government, the private sector, and with people from different cultures around the world.
- **Foreign Language Skills** - While FAS provides language training to officers, having language skills and/or an interest/facility to learn languages is important for success in FAS.

4. Frequently Asked Questions

The Application Process

1. Do I have to apply via USA Jobs?
 - Yes.
2. Should my resume include anything specific?
 - Your resume should include job information, personal information, education and work experience, and any other qualifications that you think are relevant. For job information, make sure you include your employer's name and your dates of employment.
3. Are there any limits to what can be provided on the resume?
 - You should provide all the information you feel is relevant in determining your qualifications and eligibility for the position outlined in the announcement.
4. Do I have to meet the qualifications and eligibility requirements by the closing date of the announcement?
 - No but you do need to complete all experience and/or education requirements by September 1, 2014.
5. If I apply as a GS-12, will you still consider me for a GS-11?
 - No. You will need to indicate each grade level or the lowest grade level you are willing to accept at the time you apply. Consider this carefully because if you only mark GS-12 you will not be considered for any GS-11 openings.
6. Do I need to submit my transcripts at the same time as I submit my application?
 - Yes, but unofficial transcripts are acceptable. You will be required to submit the official version before you actually report for duty. Your transcript will need to include department, courses and course numbers and grades. Please remember to black out your social security numbers on your transcripts.
7. What else do I need to include with my application?
 - If you want to qualify your experience on the basis of your federal employment, do not forget to include your most recent SF-50. You should also make sure to include your email address as we will mainly be communicating via email. If you are a veteran and would like to qualify for veteran's preference, you will need to include a DD-214.
8. Do I have to complete the assessment tool?
 - Yes.

9. How long is the assessment stage of the hiring process?
- See the timeline on the last page.

The Written Exam

10. Are accommodations provided?
- The Agency will provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities (i.e., alternative means of communication such as Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) If you need a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application and hiring process, please contact the USDA Target Center at 202-720-2600, voice and TDD. Decisions on granting reasonable accommodation will be on a case-by-case basis.
11. What is the best way to prepare for the written exam?
- The main objective of the written exam is to assess whether you have the basic writing, reasoning, and analytical skills to perform Foreign Agricultural Service work. The exercises will ask you to demonstrate that you can write concise, well-organized, grammatically correct, effective and persuasive English in a limited amount of time. Writing well takes time, perseverance and practice; it is not necessarily something that you can learn just to pass this exam.

The Group Exercise and Oral Interview

12. Are the group exercise and oral interviews conducted on the same day?
- Yes.
13. How many candidates are in each group?
- The number in each group exercise will depend on several factors including the number of candidates. The goal is for each group to consist of 4 to 6 candidates.
14. How long are the group exercise and oral interviews?
- You should plan to be at the testing facility all day. Additional instructions will be provided for those candidates that pass the written exam.

World Wide Availability

15. Can I choose to spend my entire career on foreign assignments, or conversely only a few years outside of Washington?
- In order to assure that all officers stay well connected to both headquarters and the overseas mission of FAS, the Foreign Service has rules about the maximum number of consecutive years that an officer can spend outside the United States (15 years) or in Washington (8 years).
16. If I really have an expertise or passion about one country or one part of the world, can I insist that all my overseas assignments are in that country/area?
- The key to having a successful career in the FAS Foreign Service is to be flexible. If you are only interested in living in one place overseas, the FAS Foreign Service may not be the best career choice for you.

Security

17. If I already have a security clearance, do I need to get another one for this job?
 - All FSOs require a Top Secret clearance. If you have held an active Top Secret security clearance granted by another federal agency within the past two years, you may meet the criteria for reciprocity. The minimum criteria for reciprocity includes no more than a two year break in service, the last investigation was no more than five years ago, and there has been no new information or incidents that could impact your eligibility for a clearance since your last investigation.
18. Where can I get assistance completing my security clearance package or inquire into the status of my security clearance?
 - For assistance with completing your security clearance package or to inquire into the status of your security clearance, you may email the FAS Security Office at Security.Emergencyprep@fas.usda.gov, or you may talk with a personnel security specialist between the hours of 8:30am and 4:30pm, EST, by calling (202) 720-4908.
19. How long does it take to process a typical security clearance?
 - Each case varies, but the general time averages between 60-90 days.
20. What happens if I'm denied a security clearance? Is there an appeal process?
 - If you are denied a security clearance, or your continued eligibility for access to classified information is revoked, you will be notified of the reason(s) and be provided with the procedures for filing an appeal. You will be given the opportunity to address any derogatory information that was gathered during the investigation and either correct or clarify the situation.
21. For what reasons would I be denied a security clearance?
 - Various reasons exist for why someone may be denied a security clearance. The most important factors in an investigation are the individual's honesty, candor, and thoroughness in the completion of their security clearance forms. Every case is individually assessed, using the National Security Board's 13 Adjudicative Guidelines, to determine whether the granting or continuing of eligibility for a security clearance is clearly consistent with the interests of national security.

The adjudicative guidelines include: allegiance to the United States; foreign influence; foreign preference; sexual behavior; personal conduct; financial considerations; alcohol consumption; drug involvement; emotional, mental, and personality disorders; criminal conduct; security violations; outside activities; and misuse of information technology systems.

22. Are members of my family or people living with me subject to a security check?
 - There are circumstances in which limited records checks or an investigation may be conducted on a spouse or cohabitant*. National agency checks are conducted on spouses and/or cohabitants of individuals being processed for a Top Secret level clearance, with the spouse or cohabitant's authorization. Additional investigations may be conducted when the spouse or cohabitant is a foreign national.

*A cohabitant is defined as someone with whom you live together as husband and wife and the relationship involves the mutual assumption of marital rights, duties, and obligations, which are usually manifested by married people, including, but not necessarily dependent on, sexual relations.

23. What does FAS do to ensure the safety of its officers overseas?

- The security conditions and requirements at each post are assessed and set by the State Department and these requirements apply to FAS officers. Prior to departing for an overseas assignment, an officer is required to take security training. When overseas, further training is provided. FAS takes the security of its employees very seriously.

Other Questions

24. How are candidates selected from the Certificate of Eligibles? Are there additional criteria?

- The Director General will have a file for each candidate on the Certificate that includes the candidate's resume; written, group and oral test scores. Together with the assessors, the Director General will consider candidates based on the needs of the service. Language and technical skills may come into play here.

25. How will my experience with FAS be different from my previous overseas experience in the Peace Corps?

- There are some similarities between the Foreign Service and the Peace Corps. Both require the ability to be successful in a foreign environment and both demand a high commitment to public service; however, they are also very different. In the Peace Corps, you often live in remote rural villages and work on a grass-roots level within a single community. The type of work a volunteer does is ultimately determined by the needs of the host country. Your main focus is on the individual. In the Foreign Service, you often live in dense urban areas and work in an office setting with regular interaction with business people and senior government officials. The type of work an FSO does is ultimately determined by the needs of the U.S. Government. Your main focus is obtaining access for U.S. suppliers to the foreign market.

26. How long will I remain in the United States before actually getting posted overseas?

- Typically new employees are placed in Washington assignments for the first 12- months (average is 18 months) before being posted overseas.

27. How often will I be able to come back to the United States to see my family?

- You will accrue annual leave and home leave. You can use annual leave at any time to travel home, or elsewhere, at your own expense, just as you would if stationed in the United States (subject to your supervisor's approval of course). Home leave is a special leave category for Foreign Service officers. All tours provide for at least one home leave break at the end of your tour.

28. How long is a normal tour?

- Most of our overseas tours are for three years with the option to extend for the fourth year. In posts that warrant a hardship differential (e.g. China but not France), a three-year tour provides for two rest and recuperation breaks (R&R). For hardship posts a four-year tour

provides for two R&Rs and a home leave break after two years and again at the end of the tour.

29. Who should I contact if I have other questions?

- If you have other questions about the vacancy announcement, assessment process, or Foreign Service, please send an email to FASForeignServiceRecruitment@fas.usda.gov.

5. A few suggestions to help you prepare for the process.

- Suggested websites:
 - Foreign Agricultural Service (<http://www.fas.usda.gov/>)
 - Current FAS World Production, Markets, and Trade Reports
 - Global Agricultural Information Network
 - FAS Production, Supply and Distribution (PS&D) Online Database World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates
 - Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin Crop Explorer (<http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer>)
 - Economic Research Service: International Markets & Trade (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-trade.aspx>)
 - Feed the Future (<http://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/foreign-agricultural-service-food-education-program-fuels-food-thought>)
 - World Trade Organization (<http://www.wto.org/>)
 - Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (<http://www.ustr.gov/>)
 - Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (<http://www.iatp.org/>)
 - Congressional Research Service Reports (<http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/crs/>)
- Suggested reading list:
 - Current Affairs: U.S. News and World Report, The Economist, Time, Newsweek
 - Agriculture:
 - [Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade](#)
 - Berry, Wendell, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*
 - Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*
 - Any op-eds by the Secretary of Agriculture
 - Tannahill, Reay, *Food in History*, New York: Broadway Books, 1995
 - Foreign Service:
 - [Adventures in the Foreign Agricultural Service](#) by Bob Tetro
 - [Diplomacy as a Career](#)
 - Dorman, Shawn, *Inside a U.S. Embassy*, 3rd edition, Washington: Potomac Books Inc., 2011
 - Surviving the Fiscal Drought: The Foreign Agricultural and Commercial Services, Foreign Service Journal, May 2009
 - Linderman, Patricia and Melissa Brayer-Hess, [Realities of Foreign Service Life](#), Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2007
 - Kopp, Harry W. and Charles A. Gillespie, *Career Diplomacy: Life and Work in the US Foreign Service*, Second Edition, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2011

2014 Timeline

Note: Timeline is subject to change without notice.

Activity	Dates
Vacancy Announcement	April 2014
Public Information Session Patriots Plaza III 355 E Street SW Washington, DC Auditorium A, 1 st Floor 1:00 – 2:30 pm	April 7, 2014
Application Review	April - May 2014
Results letters and schedule information for written exam sent to applicants	May 2014
Written Exam	June 2014
Results letters and schedule information for group/oral interviews sent to applicants	June 2014
Group/Oral Interviews	July - August 2014
Results and pre-employment invitation letters sent to applicants	August 2014
Hiring selections are made	August 2014
Applicants obtain medical and security clearances	September - December 2014
Employment offers are made	January – February 2015