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USDA
FOREIGN
AGRICULTURAL
SERVICE

GUIDE TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER SELECTION PROCESS

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A Message from the Foreign Agricultural Service Administrator



The Foreign Agricultural Service is the lead U.S. trade agency tasked with promoting exports of U.S. agricultural products. The Agency advances the growth of U.S. agricultural exports through market intelligence, trade policy, trade capacity building, and trade promotion programs. In addition, the Foreign Agricultural Service helps countries improve their agricultural systems and build their trade capacity. We also administer food assistance programs that help combat hunger, foster education, and ensure long-term food security. The Foreign Agricultural Service links U.S. agriculture to the world to enhance export opportunities and global food security.

Our Agricultural Attachés help fulfill our critical mission as the eyes, ears, and voice for U.S. agriculture around the world. They identify problems, provide practical solutions, advance opportunities for U.S. agriculture and work to support U.S. foreign policy around the globe.

The opportunities are enormous for inquisitive people who like to use data and their imagination. Our Foreign Service cadre are on the front lines of agricultural trade policy and we are represented in more than 94 countries around the world.

This year we are poised to overcome critical longstanding trade barriers, reach record export levels, fight climate change, and ensure the world's most vulnerable are fed. We depend on our Foreign Service Officers to make things happen. They collect information, interact with foreign governments, and solve trade problems. To promote U.S. agricultural exports, which helps our farmers make a better living, we need talented and passionate individuals. Are you one of them?

If you are looking for a career that is both meaningful and challenging, consider taking part in our Foreign Service selection process. We hope to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Daniel B. Whitley
Administrator
Foreign Agricultural Service

Section I

The Foreign Service

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is one of the U.S. Government's six 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 fulfill 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 and about 150 Foreign Service Officers, and more than 300 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 are plenty of opportunities. The next application window is scheduled for May 2-20, 2022, and the assessment will take place in August 2022.

Is the Foreign Service Right for You?

By joining the Foreign Service, you will have opportunities to live in exotic places, experience foreign cultures, participate in making history, and make friends all over the world. This lifestyle is not for everyone. You will be expected to spend three-fourths of your career overseas, moving every 3 or 4 years, and in special hardship assignments, your family may not always be able to go with you. From highly populated urban cities to developing countries, there can be challenges in serving abroad. However, officers are also presented with abundant opportunities to explore new cultures and have an adventure of a lifetime! The following State Department quiz may help you to decide if this is the right career choice for you: <https://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/quiz/>.

Agricultural attachés are the eyes, ears, and voice for U.S. agriculture around the world. They identify problems, provide practical solutions, and work to advance opportunities for U.S. agriculture and support U.S. foreign policy around the globe.

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

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, development, and market promotion issues as they arise. They are the front-line professionals representing the Department of Agriculture in approximately 94 overseas field offices in U.S. diplomatic missions covering 176 countries. They can be sent anywhere in the world, at any time, to serve the diplomatic needs of the United States. *For a detailed description of what it is like serving abroad with the FAS Foreign Service, please refer to the essays provided in Section III of this guide and the FAS Foreign Service Careers website:* <https://www.fas.usda.gov/fas-foreign-service-careers>.

One of my favorite aspects about being an agricultural officer is that no day is the same and each day presents its own opportunities and challenges.

- Lazaro Sandoval, FSO,
Mumbai, India

Additionally, the following video can provide more details on a career with FAS: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBWBWpNcq-E>.

Section II

The Foreign Service Officer Selection Process

GS-09 Requirements

All educational credentials must be earned from an accredited college or university. Applicants must meet all qualifications and eligibility requirements by the closing date of the announcement, including specialized experience and/or education, as defined below.

To qualify for this position at the GS-09 level, applicants must possess one of the following:

1. One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-07 level in the Federal service OR
2. Have qualifying education OR
3. Have a combination of specialized experience and qualifying education.

Specialized Experience

Experience assisting with professional work in **one of the following five areas**:

- Analyzing economic and trade policies; or
- Analyzing marketing and consumer trends; or
- Conducting statistical analysis; or
- Writing in economic subjects; or
- Financial market analysis

Qualifying Education

To qualify for the GS-09 level based on education, applicants must have successfully completed a master's degree (or equivalent) or 2 full years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to such a degree, in a field of study directly related to the duties of this position, such as: economics, agricultural or applied economics, statistics, or other directly related fields of study from an accredited university.

Combination of Specialized Experience and Qualifying Education

Applicants may have combinations of successfully completed education and specialized experience to meet total qualification requirements. The total percentages must equal at least 100 percent to qualify for the GS-09 grade level.

GS-11 Requirements

To qualify for this position at the GS-11 level, applicants must possess one of the following:

1. One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-9 level in the Federal service **OR**
2. Have qualifying education **OR**
3. Have a combination of specialized experience and qualifying education.

Specialized Experience

To qualify based on specialized experience applicants must possess one year or more of specialized experience that was equivalent to at least the next lower grade level (GS-09) in the Federal service that has provided them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to successfully perform the duties of

I could not have asked for a more challenging, yet stimulating, position with such a wide range of different tasks I get to work on in any given day.

- *Olutayo Akingbe, FSO,
Cairo, Egypt*

the position at the GS-11 level.

Experience assisting with or performing professional work in, **two of the following five areas**:

- Analyzing economic and trade policies; or
- Analyzing marketing and consumer trends; or
- Conducting statistical analysis; or
- Writing in economic subjects; or
- Financial market analysis

Qualifying Education

To qualify for the GS-11 level based on education applicants must have successfully completed at least three full years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to a Ph.D. degree such as: economics, agricultural or applied economics, statistics, or other directly related fields of study from an accredited university.

Combination of Specialized Experience and Qualifying Education

Applicants may have combinations of successfully completed education and specialized experience to meet total qualification requirements. The total percentages must equal at least 100 percent to qualify for the GS-11 grade level. Only graduate education beyond the second full-time year may be combined with experience.

GS-12 Requirements

To qualify for this position at the GS-12 level applicants must possess one year or more of specialized experience that was equivalent to at least the next lower grade level (GS-11) in the Federal service that has provided them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to successfully perform the duties of the position at the GS-12 level. Specialized experience may have been obtained in the private or public (local, county, state, Federal) sectors, be paid or unpaid, and is typically gained in the same field as the position being filled or another very closely related field.

Experience performing professional work in **one of the following three areas**:

- Analyzing economic and trade policies; or
- Analyzing marketing and consumer trends; or
- Performing market analysis

AND

Experience performing professional work in conducting economic analysis and writing on economic subjects.

NOTE: There is no substitution of education allowed at the GS-12 level.

Additional notes:

- Specialized experience may have been obtained in the private or public (local, county, state, Federal) sectors, be paid or unpaid, and is typically gained in the same field as the position being filled or another very closely related field. Applicants must provide evidence of the type and length of specialized experience.
- Applicants qualifying based on education must submit copies of their college transcripts.
- To be eligible for consideration, the applicant must meet specialized experience and/or education requirements no later than the closing date of the vacancy announcement.
- Applicants qualifying based on a combination of experience and education must show evidence of their experience in their resume and they must submit copies of their college transcripts.
- 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/>). Starting on May 2, 2022 through May 20, 2022, use the search function on the USAJOBS website to locate “**Foreign Agricultural Affairs Officer Trainee**” in “**Washington, District of Columbia.**” 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**

2022 ASSESSMENT TIMELINE

Public Information Session #1 ¹	April 5, 2022 8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m. (EST)
Vacancy Announcement	May 2-20, 2022
Public Information Session #2	May 3, 2022 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m. (EST)
Application Review	June/July 2022
Results letters and schedule information for the Written Exercise and Assessment Forum sent to applicants via email.	July/August 2022
Written Exercise	July/August 2022
Assessment Forum	August/September 2022
Results and pre-employment invitation letters sent to applicants via email.	October/November 2022
Acceptance of tentative job offer.	November/December 2022
Applicants initiate medical and security clearances.	December 2022/January 2023

1. Note: Participants will need to register for the Public Information Session to get the link at [FASGetInformation](https://www.fas.usda.gov/fas-foreign-service-careers). It will be conducted on the GlobalMeet Webcaster platform. The recording will be available on the FAS Website (<https://www.fas.usda.gov/fas-foreign-service-careers>).
2. Schedule subject to change without notice.

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 relative to the qualifications specified in the announcement. The highest-ranking applicants will be invited to take the Written Exercise. Applicants that successfully complete the Written Exercise will then be invited to participate in the Foreign Agricultural Service Assessment Forum. Applicants will be notified by email if they have passed each of these stages.

Please check the FAS website closer to the announcement date in May 2022 for details on the assessment exercises. Those candidates who pass all the exercises of the Assessment will be placed on a list called the Certificate of Eligibility. Candidates who decline an offer are removed from the Certificate. The number of candidates selected for a conditional offer depends on funding availability and the needs of the service.

Did you know that the Foreign Agricultural Service is one of the U.S. government's six foreign affairs agencies as designated by the Foreign Service Act of 1980?

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 FAS 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. 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 medical

clearances. Candidates can either schedule exams at the Department of State's Office of Medical Service or at their own physician's office. 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 background investigation, conducted by the Defense Counterintelligence Security Agency and adjudicated by the USDA's Personnel and Document Security Division, provides information necessary to both determine a candidate's suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and their eligibility for a Top-Secret clearance. The applicant's suitability is based on the 8 suitability factors as described in 5 CFR 731 and eligibility for access to a Top-Secret clearance is based on the 13 Adjudicative Guidelines set forth in Security Executive Agent Directive 4. Factors considered during the adjudication process are as follows, but not limited to: Allegiance to the United States, Personal Conduct, Financial Considerations, Alcohol Consumption, Drug Involvement, Criminal Conduct, Honesty, Psychological Conditions, Misconduct or Negligence in Employment. 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 2 years and whose last background investigation is no more than 5 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 2 years old still need to update their documentation to support an updated investigation.

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

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

- 1. Oral and Written Communication Skills** – Expresses ideas and information in written and oral forms clearly, succinctly, accurately, and in an organized manner that sustains the reader or listener's attention and interest; uses English language conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence and paragraph structure; tailors communication to the intended purpose and audience.
 - a. Speaking
 - b. Listening
 - c. Writing
 - d. Editing

- 2. Analytical Skills** – To absorb and retain complex information drawn from a variety of sources; to draw reasoned conclusions from analysis and synthesis of available information; to evaluate the importance, reliability, and usefulness of information; to weigh relative merits of competing demands; to analyze and draw correct conclusions from pertinent data; to recognize patterns and trends in

numerical data; to perform mathematical operations; to assess situations and circumstances and draw sound conclusions.

- a. Gathering and analyzing information
- b. Application of analyses
- c. Making decisions and judgments

3. Interpersonal Skills – To interact with others in a constructive, cooperative, and harmonious manner, maintaining high standards of integrity and ethical conduct; to work effectively as a team player; to establish positive relationships and gain the confidence of others; to adjust or adapt to changing work situations.

- a. Social Skills
- b. Teamwork
- c. Professionalism
- d. Networking
- e. Influencing
- f. Negotiating

4. Client Service Skills – To assess client needs and provide related information or assistance; to meet or exceed client expectations; to proactively support client initiatives; to formulate creative alternatives or solutions and flexibly respond to client needs.

- a. Meeting expectations
- b. Stakeholder communication
- c. Awareness
- d. Initiative
- e. Outreach

5. Cultural Adaptability/Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Communicates effectively, recognizes and respects other cultures, and uses that knowledge and experience to advance the goals of FAS; leverages diversity by fostering an inclusive workplace; and supports equal opportunity and civil rights policies.

- a. Adapts behavior to other cultures
- b. Adapts services and processes to cultural concerns
- c. Demonstrates inclusive behavior

6. Leadership Skills – To oversee projects and resources.

- a. Task and assignment management – The process of monitoring a project through its life cycle. This involves planning, testing, tracking, and reporting.
- b. Resource management – The ability to manage various resources effectively. Those resources can be intangible (people and time) and tangible (equipment, materials, and finances).

4. A Few Suggested Websites to Help You Prepare for the Process

- FAS (<http://www.fas.usda.gov/>)
- Careers at FAS (<https://www.fas.usda.gov/about-fas/careers>)

- Global Agricultural Information Network (<https://gain.fas.usda.gov>)
- FAS Production, Supply and Distribution Online Database World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimate (<https://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/app/index.html#/app/home>)
- Economic Research Service: International Markets & Trade (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-trade.aspx>)
- AIM for Climate (<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/11/02/launching-agriculture-innovation-mission-climate>)
- World Trade Organization (<http://www.wto.org/>)
- Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (<http://www.ustr.gov/>)

Additional Resources

- Uncertainty, expense, and recurring goodbyes: The Life of a U.S. Foreign Service family (<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/us-foreign-service-family-cmd/index.html>)
- List of Foreign Service Blogs (<https://afsa.org/foreign-service-blogs>)

Section III

Personal Experiences from USDA FAS Foreign Service Officers

Serving as a Foreign Service Officer in FAS is an opportunity to represent U.S. agriculture in a global environment. The unique experiences of attachés can vary between posts. In this section, we highlight the experiences of four foreign service officers in different embassies and serving at various grade-levels.

A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Olutayo Akingbe



Being an agricultural attaché in Cairo is truly a remarkable experience. I could not have asked for a more challenging, yet stimulating, position with a such a wide range of different tasks I get to work on in any given day.

Cairo is as exciting a city as they come. I am fortunate that I live very close to the embassy because traffic is a severe issue in Cairo. However, my commute to and from work is only a 5-minute drive (10 minutes on a bad day). Because we live in what is considered a high threat post, my embassy colleagues and I are required to commute to and from work in armored shuttles that pick us up at a scheduled time each day. So I spend each morning engaging in conversation with my colleagues and taking in spectacular views of the Nile River on the drive to the embassy.

With a population of more than 100 million, Egypt is by far the largest market in the region and a major importer of food and agriculture products, so trade here is very important. I start my day gathering information on the government's new halal import regulation to assess its trade impacts. I reach out to government and industry contacts that I have cultivated during my time here to gain vital on the ground information on what this could mean for U.S. food and agricultural exports. I'll use this information to collaborate with my colleagues back in Washington to discuss strategies on how to address the issue.

After that, I check in with our staff in Tel Aviv, Israel. Cairo is a regional post that covers five other countries, with local staff in Amman, Jordan, and Tel Aviv. Managing staff remotely can be tricky, so it is important for me to have regular calls with them since the current climate does not make it easy to travel. Top on the agenda this day are the upcoming negotiations for the Agreement on Trade in Agricultural Products as part of the US-Israel Free Trade Agreement and what items we want to bring to the table.

I'm also responsible for our Iraq portfolio and the Annual Grain and Feed Report that is due in the next few weeks. Since we don't have staff in Baghdad, we rely on a consultant to help provide analysis on Iraq's grain and feed sector that we use to inform our report. After my call with Tel Aviv, I spend some time reviewing the data the consultant sent and consider how to use it in our report.

After lunch, I take a few minutes to sit down with the office administrative assistant to do the monthly count of

our petty cash account and discuss next quarter's budget. This is probably the less glamorous part of the job, but no less important. As foreign service officers, we always want to make sure we utilize government funds appropriately and efficiently.

Now it's time to meet my Department of State colleagues in the Public Affairs section (PAS) to help record a short welcome video with the Ambassador for our upcoming Virtual Agricultural Trade Mission for processed food ingredients. Because travel is limited, our office has had to move a lot of our normally in-person activities to the virtual space. The previous week, I drafted a script for the Ambassador to read with facts about U.S. agricultural trade with Egypt. Today, I'm meeting with PAS to discuss edits and attend the recording.

Once that is done, I have my last meeting of the day with our USDA Food for Progress implementing partner. They work in-country to directly support leadership within Egypt's newly established National Food Safety Agency, providing training and capacity building in a way that helps to facilitate trade and compliance with the World Trade Organization and Codex guidelines. We discuss current activities and any operational issues.

By this time, it is already 4:30 p.m. and time to catch the shuttle back home! Beyond safety, one of the benefits about the shuttle system is that it promotes work-life balance. I know when it's time to leave the office and enjoy the parts of living in Cairo that are outside my job.

After work, I typically text one of my neighbors to see if they want to walk to a neighborhood restaurant for dinner. I live in a lively area with lots of restaurants, cafes, and shops open until all hours of the night, so it's fun to check out the scene as a way to decompress from the day.

Olutayo Akingbe is a first-tour Foreign Service Officer and Agricultural Attaché in Cairo, Egypt since August 2019. Olutayo began her career with FAS in 2016 as a foreign service trainee. While in Washington, she served as China Desk Officer, Deputy Chief of Staff to the FAS Administrator, Coarse Grains Commodity Analyst, and Special Assistant to the Deputy Administrator of the then Office of Foreign Service Operations. Prior to FAS, Olutayo worked in on agricultural development and food assistance programs for USAID and development contractors. Olutayo has a bachelor's degree in International Relations and African Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and a master's degree in International Affairs from Columbia University.

A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Jenia Ustinova



“Jenia, welcome to *pais tropical*...” read the opening line of a letter left on my desk by the previous Agricultural Attaché who served in Brasilia. It was my first day on the job, and I had little sense of the magnitude of the adventure I was about to embark. All that I know is that during the next three weeks, I would somehow complete two field trips to assess Brazil’s soybean harvest, and in the end, would produce my first ever Global Agricultural Information Network (popularly known as GAIN) report which would end up in the Financial Times for its forecast of Brazil’s soybean stocks.

Three years and many, many trips and reports later, I am no longer nervous about putting to use my Portuguese-language skills talking with Brazilian farmers, or about making the news for my analysis. Instead, I am in awe of the front row seat that I have been afforded to observe and report on Brazil’s agricultural evolution. In my

numerous conversations with traders, market analysts, and producers, I have debated every aspect of this transformation, from the changing domestic demand dynamics in China, and Beijing’s role in propelling Brazil’s commodity export boom, to whether Latin America’s largest maritime port has enough capacity to continue shipping ever-growing cotton exports to Asia. I can produce data charts with the best of them, run excel formulas to flag trade anomalies, and, of course, balance my production, supply, and distribution tables.

Producing GAIN reports is just part of my job as an Agricultural Attaché. Some days are spent feverishly preparing briefing papers and talking points for the Ambassador as he engages in a public relations campaign to regain market access for a U.S. agricultural product. Other days, I am drawing on these points myself, engaging my counterparts at the Ministry of Agriculture in a marathon of a technical discussion. Next week, I am scheduled to be with my Embassy colleagues scoping out restaurants, working farms, and setting up meetings with top Brazilian Agricultural Caucuses deputies for a U.S. Congressional Delegation visit. Quieter afternoons may be spent managing the office budget, analyzing our expenditures from the last 6 months, to identify whether we need to request more money or to return some funds as the fiscal year winds down. The pace is quick, the tasks are varied, but one thing is for sure, I am never bored.

Getting to the Embassy just before 8 a.m. today, I glance at my calendar which is full of meetings with senior staff members. As the acting Agricultural Counselor for the next couple of weeks, I am responsible for representing FAS in small policy meetings with key advisers to the Ambassador and much larger country team meetings, with representation from every section at the Embassy, as well as from all five consulates. By noon, in addition to the scheduled meetings, I already fielded two queries from the Front Office, wanting FAS input on the potential impact for agriculture stemming from a bilateral trade agreement. This afternoon, I will attend the interagency Housing Board meeting, where the seven members will approve housing assignments for incoming FSOs this summer. I will finish the day late; today is the Ambassador’s reception for the incoming Economic Counselor. Every day is different, and I would not have it any other way!

Jenia Ustinova is an Agricultural Attaché in Brasilia. Her portfolio includes bilateral livestock market access issues

and the Brazilian corn, wheat, and rice markets. Prior to arriving in Brazil in August 2018, Jenia worked in the FAS' Office of Trade Agreement Monitoring, where she coordinated closely with USTR on agricultural enforcement issues in Central America. Prior to her government service, Jenia worked at the World Bank and Eurasia Group. Jenia received her bachelor's degree in Public Policy from Syracuse University, and her master's degree from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. She is joined at Post by her husband and their two sons: Nicholas (who is 5) and Max (who is 2).

A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Lazaro Sandoval



One of my favorite aspects about being an agricultural officer is that no day is the same and each day presents its own opportunities and challenges. This is especially the case in the massive, hyperactive city of Mumbai. A typical day for me starts early, around 8:00 a.m. with a big cup of coffee, while I review email messages and major news developments. This sets the tone for the day and gives me an idea of the major tasks ahead. After that, I check in with my staff of four locally employed specialists and marketing team to review what they are working on and determine if they need any additional guidance and/or resources to complete their work. As a manager, this is the most important task of my day, to ensure the office successfully advances our market promotion, reporting, and trade facilitation priorities.

Towards the middle of the day, I have a call with representatives of the Maharashtra Agriculture Department to discuss the progress of an ongoing capacity-building project to promote food security by giving farmers access to cutting-edge data and best practices. This is a unique project, as it not only relies on the involvement of FAS, but other USDA agencies, such as the

National Agricultural Statistics Service, the Economic Research Service, and the Agricultural Marketing Service, who will provide technical assistance.

Meanwhile, our office generates at least 50 reports a year on a variety of subjects such as coffee, wine, spirits, forest products, cotton, food safety regulations, market trends, and most recently, the impact of COVID-19. This afternoon, I am reviewing two fascinating reports on India's burgeoning plant-based meats and e-commerce sectors. These reports provide key market intelligence to U.S. stakeholders as they navigate how to enter and market their products in India. As such, a very careful review of these reports by me is essential to deliver high quality information to the public.

Tonight, I have two back-to-back activities to help generate local demand for U.S. products. India is a rapidly expanding market for U.S. foods and beverages, thanks to continued economic growth and demographic shifts that are leading to an evolution of tastes and preferences. In response, our office established #TasteOfAmerica, an innovative multimedia initiative to connect customers in India with U.S. agricultural products and their suppliers through in-person activities and social media. At 5:00 p.m., the Consul General and I will inaugurate our #TasteOfAmerica campaign at Nature's Basket (a local retail grocery chain), which will highlight U.S. foods and beverages at its physical stores and online platform during the next 2 months, followed by a masterclass with celebrity chef Rakhee Vaswani at the Palate Culinary Academy, to prepare traditional Indian sweets with U.S. ingredients such as pistachios, almonds, blueberries, and cranberries on camera. These two events just represent a few of the creative marketing activities we have developed. Combined, our #TasteOfAmerica activities have reached more than 100 million consumers through strategic partnerships with local stakeholders (such as chefs, importers, and retailers) and U.S. industry associations.

Before I depart for our market promotion activities tonight, I have a meeting with a local importer to discuss his interest in importing U.S. blueberries and ongoing import clearance issues. This trade facilitation work is essential to maintain the flow of U.S. agricultural goods to India and expand our offerings in the market. I promise to reach out to local customs and food safety officials to find a resolution. Finally, as 5:00 p.m. approaches, I leave the office to take part in a fun evening highlighting U.S. foods and beverages.

Lazaro Sandoval joined FAS as a civil servant in 2010. He worked for 4 years as an agricultural economist with the Office of Global Affairs – Livestock and Poultry division and another year as an economist in the Office of Agreements and Scientific Affairs where he conducted analysis in support of WTO Doha Round negotiations. He joined the Foreign Service in 2015 and served as Agricultural Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 2019, he arrived in Mumbai, India, where he serves as the Senior Agriculture Attaché at the U.S. Consulate General. He is originally from Santa Cruz, California and has a B.S. in Agricultural Business from California State University, Fresno (2010) and a master's degree in International Commerce and Policy from George Mason University in Virginia (2012). He is fluent in Spanish.

A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Kelly Stange



I leave our house with my daughter at 7:00 a.m., dropping her off at the bus stop outside the secure compound where we live; then I power-walk about one kilometer through a neighborhood of luxury hotels and shopping centers to get to the office. I pass the U.S. Embassy, then I cross a highly trafficked street via a pedestrian overpass, heading for the building where our agency has kept an office in Bangkok for at least 25 years.

I want to be at work early for our 8:00 a.m. conference among Southeast Asia FAS offices, and I run through my presentation one more time. The 12-hour time difference means that meeting schedules with Washington can be a challenge—sometimes early in the morning, sometimes later in the evening—but whenever they happen, we are happy to connect and communicate about trade issues. For this conference, I give a presentation on our social media projects: Tasty USA, a popular Facebook page that promotes U.S. food and drink, and American Food Academy, a new online training platform for chefs and culinary students. My colleagues in Vietnam present their new initiatives, and the team in

Washington talks about the future of in-person trade missions. I raise some questions about how we might share social media content in different countries to save some time and money; however, this isn't so simple, since each country has its own interests, and there's not always a one-size-fits-all message. But it's a good conversation, and we agree to talk more about social media soon.

As soon as that conference ends, I join a video meeting with our team at the U.S. Mission in Rangoon, Burma. I manage three employees there doing reporting and marketing work in an extremely challenging environment, due to a military coup and struggles with COVID-19. I connect with them as often as I can—they exemplify resiliency, and thanks to them we are keeping U.S. products in front of consumers there.

Next, I head back across the street for a monthly half-hour meeting at the Embassy with the acting Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). This is the biggest U.S. Embassy in the world right now, with more than 40 agencies represented here. I want to communicate succinctly on why agriculture matters and how it fits into the Mission's goals. Today, we discuss deliverables for an upcoming high-level meeting; I am optimistic that we can have a climate change-related item for the principals to celebrate. I update the DCM on plans for the Chargé d'Affaires—the acting ambassador—to be in our social media campaign, where he will speak in Thai about American turkey and Thanksgiving.

On my way out the door, the Office Management Specialists congratulate me on winning the Embassy pumpkin pie contest. While I savor that sweet victory, the DCM suggests that I might have had a slight advantage—since I'm the ag. counselor and, thus, a food expert. While there's no obvious connection between FAS work and being a good cook, it's true that I've had a lot of recent practice: I baked five pies within two weeks while preparing for a Thanksgiving how-to video for one of our social media initiatives. That's just training, not cheating, right?

Next, I head downstairs to join the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services Council meeting, where Embassy heads of section review the Mission's operating budget. The General Services Officer presents some proposed changes to services. I vote to support the initial budget proposal. After the quick and efficient meeting, it's time for lunch, so on my way back across the street I pick up some spicy fried chicken and rice from a street vendor—delicious, for the equivalent of about \$1.50.

Back at the office, I prepare for a meeting with my counterpart at the European Union. The Agricultural Attaché and I host him in our office and discuss a variety of topics. We mostly focus on the Methane Pledge, which was announced as a joint initiative between the United States and the EU in the fall. We had worked with the EU Attaché to get a joint letter to the Thai government before COP26 asking the Thai Government to join. Our meeting runs 45 minutes, and we agree that we will meet informally with some other climate-interested countries' agricultural attachés, soon.

I use the next 30 minutes to eat that spicy chicken, clear a grain report for the Ag. Specialist, and check emails. I leave with our driver to cross Bangkok to meet five colleagues from other sections of the Embassy for a tour to learn about the U.S. military's joint research with the Thai military to combat infectious diseases. Their achievements are amazing, and their work with mosquitoes is especially impressive. After the tour, there is a special activity: We each get to force-mate mosquitoes, so that the females will lay eggs for the research projects. It's pretty strange, but it's also fascinating. Everyone leaves a little smarter and more grateful for these scientists.

My last stop of the day—Billy's Smokehouse! Chef Billy is part of our "Tasty Recommended" campaign, which promotes U.S. foods on various restaurant menus. His enthusiasm for the campaign is infectious. He had asked me for a U.S. flag for his American-style barbecue restaurant; I happen to have a rather large one, so I deliver it to him at his restaurant before walking the rest of the way home along some bustling Bangkok streets.

Kelly Stange currently serves as the FAS Agricultural Counselor stationed in Bangkok, Thailand, covering Myanmar and Laos. Before joining the FAS Bangkok Office of Agricultural Affairs, she served as FAS Foreign Affairs Managing Director from August 2020 to June 2021. Previously in Foreign Affairs, she was the Foreign Service Trainee Coordinator and Special Advisor, helping FAS recruit, test, hire, onboard, and train the new trainees to be future Foreign Service Officers. From 2014 to 2019, Ms. Stange served as Agricultural Counselor in Berlin, Germany. As a Foreign Service Officer, she represented the USDA in Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Hungary. From 2010 to 2014, Ms. Stange served as the Agricultural Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Costa Rica, covering Panama and Nicaragua. Her work included monitoring and evaluation of McGovern-Dole Food for Education programs and Food for Progress projects in Nicaragua, promotion of U.S. food and animal feed in the region, and enforcement of the CAFTA-DR Free Trade Agreement and the Trade Promotion Agreement with Panama. Ms. Stange served in Brussels, Belgium, from 2006 to 2010 as the Agricultural Attaché for the U.S. Mission to the European Union where she was responsible for trade policy issues covering animal products, fruits and vegetables, and the U.S.-EU Veterinary Equivalency Agreement.

Before her assignments overseas, she worked at FAS in Washington, D.C., from 2002 to 2006, analyzing world beef markets and trade policy, focusing on EU trade in meat, seafood, and dairy products. Prior to working at USDA/FAS, Ms. Stange worked in Washington, D.C., as a research economist for the Capitolink lobbying firm. Ms. Stange earned her B.S. and M.S. in Agricultural Economics at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She speaks fluent German and Spanish, as well as some French.

Section IV

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?
 - Yes. You do need to complete all experience and/or education requirements by the closing date of the vacancy announcement on May 20, 2022.
 - 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 or GS-9 openings.
5. If I am currently a GS-13 or higher grade, will you hire me as a GS-13?
 - No, these positions are only being announced and filled at the GS-9, GS-11, and GS-12 levels.
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 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 (prescreen questionnaire)?
 - Yes.
9. How long is the assessment stage of the hiring process?
 - See the assessment timeline in the "How to Apply" section of this guide.

Assessment Forum

10. Are accommodations provided for people with disabilities?

- The Agency will provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities. If you need a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application and hiring process, please connect with the point of contact on the vacancy announcement. Decisions regarding reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis.

11. How long will the entire Assessment Forum take?

- You should plan for an entire day. Additional instructions will be provided for those candidates who are invited to the Assessment Forum.

Worldwide Availability

12. Can I choose to spend my entire career on foreign assignments, or conversely only a few years outside of Washington, D.C.?

- No. 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, D.C. (8 years).

13. 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?

- No. 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

14. 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 2 years, you may meet the criteria for reciprocity. The minimum criteria for reciprocity include no more than a 2-year break in service, the last investigation was no more than 5 years ago, and there has been no new information or incidents that could impact your eligibility for a clearance since your last investigation.

15. 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 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., EST, by calling (202) 720-4908.

16. How long does it take to process a typical security clearance?

- Each case varies, but the general time averages anywhere from 6 months to a year.

17. 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.

18. 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 Security Executive Agent Directive 4, 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; psychological condition; criminal conduct; handling protected information; outside activities; and use of information technology systems.
19. 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 a couple 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.
20. 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

21. How are candidates selected from the Certificate of Eligibility? Are there additional criteria?
- The Director General will have a file for each candidate on the Certificate that includes the candidate's resume and assessment scores. The Director General will consider candidates based on the needs of the service. Language and technical skills may come into play here.
22. How will my experience with FAS be different from my previous overseas experience in the Peace Corps?
- There are some similarities between the FAS 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. In the FAS Foreign Service, you are working within a U.S. trade agency, often living in dense urban areas and working in an office setting with regular interaction with food and agricultural trade stakeholders 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 maintaining and expanding global market access for the U.S. agricultural industry.
23. How long will I remain in the United States before actually getting posted overseas?
- Typically, new employees are placed in Washington, D.C. assignments for 2.5 to 3.5 years before being posted overseas, depending on previous work experience. This time does include language

training, if applicable.

24. 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.

25. How long is a normal tour?

- Average tours are typically 3 years.

26. Will I be able to begin work while waiting for my medical and security clearances to be completed?

- No, successful candidates will receive a tentative offer of employment contingent upon successfully completing pre-employment requirements, including medical and security clearances. Candidates will receive a selection confirmation and a start date once they have completed these requirements.

27. 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 FASForeignService@usda.gov.