## POSITION DESCRIPTION

# General counsel, department of agriculture

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Senate Committee | Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry |
| Agency Mission | To provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition and related issues based on public policy, the best available science and effective management. To provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds and healthy private working lands. |
| Position Overview | The general counsel is the chief law officer of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is responsible for providing legal services for all programs, operations and activities of USDA.  |
| Compensation | Level IV $158,500 (5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Secretary of Agriculture |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | The OGC is responsible for the legal leadership of an enterprise that in fiscal 2020 had $119 billion in outlays and 91,178 total employees. The OGC’s office had a fiscal 2020 budget of $41.2 million.[[2]](#endnote-2) The general counsel oversees the work of 238 legal professionals. OGC offices include a headquarters in Washington, D.C., four regional offices and various field offices throughout the nation. Direct reports include two deputy general counsels, five associate general counsels and four regional attorneys who assist the general counsel in managing the work of the office. A senior counselor also provides assistance in the immediate office of the general counsel. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Manage the office of the general counsel.
* Provide legal advice to the secretary and other USDA officials to ensure departmental actions and efforts comply with the law.
* Coordinate legal defense when the secretary or an agency is subject to litigation.
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * High degree of demonstrated competence as a legal practitioner.
* Knowledge of the regulatory functions of the department, government-controlled commodity programs (USDA directed supply/price), as well as the USDA system of delivering potentially market moving supply and demand estimates.
* Senior legal counsel/general counsel or related experience with large organization(s) with complex national and international interests.
* Effective relationships and respect within the food, energy or environmental agencies.
* Familiarity with the history of discriminatory/civil rights litigation faced by the department and the appropriate legal defense.
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| Competencies | * Capability to build bridges across departments and to collaborate.
* Relationships with Congress or ability to make them.
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| **PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Stephen Alexander Vaden (2018 to 2020) – Associate at Jones Day; Associate at Squire Patton Boggs; Law Clerk to the Honorable Samuel H. Mays, Jr. at the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. |
| Jeffrey Michael Prieto (2015 to 2017) – Acting General Counsel and Principal Deputy General Counsel at USDA; Deputy Executive Officer and General Counsel at the Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division; Trial Attorney for DOJ. |
| Ramona Emilia Romero (2010 to 2014) – Corporate Counsel for Logistics and Energy at DuPont; General Counsel for Sentinel Transportation, LLC; Associate Counsel at Crowell & Moring, LLP. |
| Marc L. Kesselman (2006 to 2010) – Deputy General Counsel at the Office of Management and Budget; Senior Counsel at DOJ; Associate at Ropes & Gray, LLP. |
| Nancy Southard Bryson (2002 to 2006) – Partner at Crowell & Moring, LLP; Assistant Chief of the Environmental Defense Section at DOJ; Assistant Counsel for Appellate Litigation at the Department of Labor. |

1. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260, December 27 ,2020), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials through January 1, 2022. The compensation information is based on guidance from the Office of Personnel Management and can be accessed [here](https://www.chcoc.gov/content/continued-pay-freeze-certain-senior-political-officials-4#:~:text=Section%20748%20of%20division%20E,on%20December%2031%2C%202020%2C%20by). If you are selected for this position, please consult the agency’s HR representative for further guidance on compensation.  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)