# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# UnderSecretary for Research, Education and Economics, 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 and also helps 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 undersecretary for research, education and economics is the chief scientist of the department and oversees Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs that fund research and education through USDA-owned research facilities, land-grant universities and the private sector. This position is responsible for ensuring the integrity of USDA research as well as the appropriate distribution of research grant funding. |
| Compensation | Level III $165,300 (5 U.S.C. § 5314)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Secretary of Agriculture in coordination with the Deputy Secretary[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | The fiscal 2017 requested budget for research, education and economics was $2.9 billion and about 8,467 staff.[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Assists the secretary in providing policy direction and leadership to advance agricultural scientific knowledge, through research, extension and education
* Serves as the department’s chief scientist
* Ensures the integrity of USDA-funded research and provides strategic vision to direct future areas of focus and funding
* Works closely with: Department of Energy and Department of the Interior research entities; land-grant universities and private research partners; and the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board (a 25-member board of stakeholders established by Congress to guide USDA research)[[4]](#endnote-4)
* Oversees the National Agricultural Library
* Oversees the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), USDA’s largest intramural research agency, with scientists in more than 100 locations nationwide and five overseas laboratories, as well as 1,200 research projects
	+ The mission of ARS is to conduct research to develop and transfer solutions to agricultural problems of high national priority, and provide access to and disseminate information to ensure high-quality, safe food and other agricultural products; assess the nutritional needs of Americans; sustain a competitive agricultural economy; enhance the natural resource base and the environment; and provide economic opportunities for rural citizens, communities and society as a whole
	+ ARS is the USDA’s principal in-house research agency
* Oversees the Economic Research Service (ERS), USDA’s primary economic and social science research agency, which is tasked with anticipating economic and policy issues that should become the focus of research to inform public policy decisions
	+ The ERS seeks to enhance public and private decision-making on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment and rural development
	+ Activities to support this mission, and the following goals, involve research and development of economic and statistical indicators on a broad range of topics, including but not limited to: global agricultural market conditions, trade restrictions, agribusiness concentration, farm and retail food prices, food-borne illnesses, food labeling, nutrition, food assistance programs, agrichemical usage, livestock waste management, conservation, genetic diversity, technology transfer and rural employment
* Oversees the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), which provides market sensitive statistics about U.S. agriculture, ranging from production and supply estimates to prices paid and wages received
	+ Monthly NASS estimates are released in a carefully controlled environment (lock-up) due to their market moving potential
	+ The mission of NASS is to provide timely, accurate and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture
	+ The statistical data NASS provides are essential to the public and private sectors for making effective policy, production and marketing decisions on a wide range of agricultural commodities
* Oversees the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), USDA’s primary extramural research funding agency
	+ NIFA targets research, education and extension projects, some of which are specific to the land-grant university system and others that are open to other participants
	+ The mission of NIFA is to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities[[5]](#endnote-5)
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Experience in or exposure to research management
* Familiarity with the land-grant university system and research structure (beneficial)[[6]](#endnote-6)
* Extensive management experience
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| Competencies | * Ability to work in a matrixed environment
* Ability to work across party lines
* Excellent leadership and management skills
* Strong communication and interpersonal skills
* Ability to work under high pressure
* Ability to build relationships with relevant stakeholders
* Integrity
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| **PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Catherine E. Woteki (2010 to 2017): Global Director, Scientific Affairs, Mars, Incorporated; Dean, College of Agriculture, Iowa State University; Undersecretary, Office of the Undersecretary, Food Safety, Department of Agriculture[[7]](#endnote-7) |
| Rajiv J. Shah (2009 to 2010): Director, Agricultural Development, Global Development Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Director of Strategic Opportunities, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Deputy Director of Policy and Finance for the Global Health Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation[[8]](#endnote-8) |
| Gale A. Buchanan (2006 to 2009): Professor, National Environmental Sound Production Agriculture Laboratory; Dean and Director, University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences; Director, Georgia Agricultural Experiment Stations[[9]](#endnote-9) |

1. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.obpa.usda.gov/budsum/fy17budsum.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Leadership Directories: https://lo.bvdep.com/PeopleDocument.asp?PersonId=-1&LDIPeopleId=190267&Save=1 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. http://appropriations.house.gov/\_files/033011drshahbio.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. http://www.fsli.org/others/Gale.Buchanan%20(2).pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-9)