# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# UnderSecretary for Rural Development, 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 undersecretary for rural development identifies emerging challenges in rural communities and examines ways in which the Department of Agriculture (USDA) rural development programs can be adapted to provide support in areas such as utilities, housing, emergency and health services, value-added agriculture and energy. The undersecretary deals with Rural Business as well. |
| Compensation | Level III $165,300 (5 U.S.C. § 5314)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Secretary of Agriculture[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** | |
| Management Scope | In fiscal 2015, Rural Development had an enacted budget of $2,675 million, but manages a program level between $20 and $30 billion among its three service areas (Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service and Rural Utilities Service).[[3]](#endnote-3) Rural Development had 4,759 employees in 2016.[[4]](#endnote-4) The undersecretary is assisted by a deputy undersecretary, chief of staff, deputy chief of staff and several special assistants, all appointed, as well as state directors in each state.[[5]](#endnote-5) |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Assists the secretary in providing policy direction and leadership for helping to improve the economy and quality of life in rural America * Provides leadership and coordination within the executive branch of a Nationwide Rural Development Program utilizing the services of executive branch departments and agencies and the agencies, bureaus, offices and services of the USDA in coordination with rural development programs of state and local governments * Supervises and controls the undersecretary and agency heads for:   + The Rural Development's Business and Cooperative Programs, which provide loans, loan guarantees and grants designed to increase economic opportunity in rural America   + The Rural Utilities Service, which has programs that enhance the quality of life and improve economic opportunity in rural communities by providing financing for the basic infrastructure of modern life   + The Rural Housing Service, which provides affordable housing to rural communities. The agency goal is to improve the quality of life in rural America by providing decent, safe and affordable housing and by developing community infrastructure. Rural Development delivers housing programs authorized by the Housing Act of 1949, as amended. Community facilities programs are authorized by the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, as amended.[[6]](#endnote-6)   + Identifies emerging challenges in rural communities and examines ways in which USDA rural development programs can be adapted to provide support in areas such as utilities, housing, emergency and health services, value-added agriculture and energy   + Ensures the large portfolio of grants and loans are responsibly managed, while ensuring new grants and loans are carefully vetted, equitable and appropriate   + Works closely with the Small Business Association, Department of Housing and Urban Development and Department of Energy[[7]](#endnote-7) |
| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** | |
| Requirements | * Knowledge of the challenges to economic growth in rural communities, including finance, infrastructure and workforce[[8]](#endnote-8) * Extensive management experience * State director from a previous administration (a plus given that they know the agency and have had practical experience) * Strong relationships or ability to form relationships with relevant stakeholders (preferred) * Strong knowledge of rural and farm policy (preferred) * Rural background (preferred) * Experience in a rural organization or business (preferred) * Background in finance (preferred) * Willingness to support the direction provided by the president and the secretary |
| Competencies | * Strong partnership-building and coordination skills, recognizing that much of rural development’s mission requires partnerships in communities and coordination[[9]](#endnote-9) * Communication, leadership and organization skills * Ability to work under high pressure * Ability to handle sensitive matters and to get others to do it as well * Energy for frequent amount of travel depending on the needs of the secretary * Good negotiation skills (preferred) * Ability to work in a matrixed agency (preferred) * Ability to work across party lines (depending on policy priorities of the administration) |
| **PAST APPOINTEES** | |
| Lisa Afua Serwah Mensah (2014 to 2017): Deputy Undersecretary for Rural Development, United States Rural Business Cooperative Service;[[10]](#endnote-10) Founding Executive Director of the Initiative on Financial Security at the Aspen Institute;[[11]](#endnote-11) Deputy Director of Economic Development, Ford Foundation[[12]](#endnote-12) | |
| Dallas P. Tonsager (2009 to 2013): Team Member, Department of Agriculture Review Team, President-Elect Obama Transition Team; Executive Director, Value Added Agriculture Development Center, Agriculture Department, State of South Dakota; State Director, South Dakota Rural Development State Office, Office of the Undersecretary, Department of Agriculture, William J. Clinton Administration[[13]](#endnote-13) | |
| Thomas C. Dorr (2001 to 2008): President and CEO, Dorr’s Pine Grove Farm Co.; Chairman, USDA Energy Council; Federal Co-Chair, Biomass Research and Development Board[[14]](#endnote-14) | |

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. <http://www.obpa.usda.gov/budsum/fy17budsum.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Leadership Directories [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.bloomberg.com/profiles/people/18733332-lisa-afua-serwah-mensah [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. http://origin.www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=bio-mensah.xml [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.allgov.com/news/appointments-and-resignations/undersecretary-for-rural-development-who-is-lisa-mensah-140713?news=853668 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Leadership Directories [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. http://www.allgov.com/officials/dorr-thomas?officialid=28553 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)