

FARM MANAGEMENT & AGRIBUSINESS

ASSIGNMENT 114

PEACE CORPS: CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The Peace Corps was established through the vision of President John F. Kennedy who challenged Americans to join a grand and global alliance to promote peace, friendship and better living conditions in the world. Since the first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Ghana in 1961, more than 148,000 American men and women have responded to the challenge. Volunteers have served in over 100 countries. Volunteers continue to respond today and 6,500 are currently serving in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific Islands, Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you help translate host country development plans into community level action, thus improving the lives of local people. You arrive, not with funds or equipment, but with skills and knowledge as well the willingness to adapt them to your community. A successful project is one that continues to function effectively even after you have left.

Before starting your two-year assignment, you receive up to three months of training that focuses on language, cross-cultural, and technical skills. It is usually provided in the country where you serve. Language and cultural training- an understanding of the country's political system, cultural norms, and interpersonal relations- helps you become an integral member of the community. Technical training gives you the ability to effectively transfer your skills and knowledge to host-country people.

YOUR WORK AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

In many of the countries in which Peace Corps Volunteers work, the economic base of rural communities is founded upon agricultural enterprise. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you help communities achieve greater food security and increase earning potential. You work in coordination with host government agencies, international development agencies, local farmer, and business organizations. You may work directly with agribusinesses or small farmers and micro-entrepreneurs. Depending on your assignment and your initial

community assessment, your responsibilities may include:

Technical Assistance and Training for Small Farmers Design and implement technical courses, seminars, and workshops in cost-benefit analysis, marketing, basic accounting, and credit management. Help farmers create farmer-owned and controlled marketing and supply cooperatives. Facilitate small business start-ups or income generating activities. Provide technical assistance in improving crop and livestock production. Advise farm families on how and when to produce and sell their goods. Help farmers better analyze traditional and potential markets by conducting a market and community needs assessment - this could lead to experimentation with direct marketing, specialty markets, or export markets.

Technical Support to Agribusinesses Improve agribusinesses by implementing idea banks for new projects. Provide technical assistance to improve management and marketing practices. Train businesses in market analysis, production techniques, economic forecasting, and financing options.

Advice to Government Agencies Provide advice to government officials who are formulating and implementing strategies for the agricultural sector. Help individuals and organizations adjust to privatization efforts and move towards a free market economy. Train community members and college students using innovative teaching methodologies at agricultural training institutions.

It is vital that you understand not only the myriad of technical problems, but also the cultural views and social and political context in which you operate. Your assignment may have little or no established structure or schedule. You continually define your role in response to the needs of the local people. Your willingness to integrate into your community and help your hosts find appropriate solutions can encourage people to participate. Your ability to organize and motivate others is as important as your technical knowledge and experience. You must also keep in mind that your role is that of a trainer so that new practices will continue even after your departure. Your success depends greatly on the relationships you forge and the trust you inspire.

EXAMPLES OF FARM MANAGEMENT/AGRIBUSINESS PROJECTS

Bolivia The Peace Corps small enterprise project in Bolivia assists individual entrepreneurs and small business groups, including agricultural associations and youth programs, to improve their business management skills through training. Volunteers work with the local people to develop and improve domestic and export market channels for agricultural organizations. Several agricultural associations have successfully increased productivity and are now in the commercialization phase. Lacking expertise in this area, these organizations have requested assistance in linking production, collection, transport, storage, and distribution functions. Volunteers also work with individual entrepreneurs or artisan groups to encourage income-generating activities.

Russia The role of the Peace Corps agribusiness specialists concentrates on the development of private and cooperative agribusinesses. Volunteers primarily focus on advising local officials on decentralization strategies for the food processing industry; providing assistance in organizing cooperative businesses in areas such as food processing or farm supplies; and rebuilding a rural service and enterprise sector. Volunteers interact with a variety of foreign agencies and organizations, including officials from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, United Nations, and U. S. Agency for International Development. They are assigned to work in a team, often in business development centers.

Morocco Inadequate agricultural production in Morocco is due in part to increasing population pressures, overstocking of rangelands and consequent destruction of range habitat. Several years of drought have made the situation worse. Peace Corps Volunteers collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform at regional agricultural offices and agricultural training institutions. They serve as extension agents facilitating the adoption of sustainable agricultural and livestock production methods for income-generation. They may work specifically with youth or rural women.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS ASSIGNMENTS IN FARM MANAGEMENT/AGRIBUSINESS

- A. BA/BS Agriculture Economics, OR
- B. Three years experience in farm management and/or agribusiness, OR

C. BA/BS degree combining agricultural AND management, including agribusiness, agricultural management, farm management, OR

D. BA/BS any business or economics discipline with one year experience in farming or agribusiness.

THE GOALS OF PEACE CORPS

1. To help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Service as a Peace Corps Volunteer offers you a unique opportunity to learn about critical development issues from the inside by helping people address the problems they have identified. You can make a tremendous contribution to the lives of others. At the same time, you discover that your experience is as much about your learning as it is about teaching.

Volunteer service develops your professional abilities and enhances your personal growth. Virtually all returning Volunteers agree they have received far more than they have given. Recent college graduates discover a focus for their career goals. Others confirm their commitment to their profession and receive career-boosting international experience. Retirees bring their accumulated life experiences to those that need and respect them most.

Many employers place great value on the Peace Corps experience. You will find that your worldview, resourcefulness, and cross-cultural skills set you apart. You can have easier access to federal government jobs or earn college credit or scholarships because of your Peace Corps service. Whatever you decide to do after Peace Corps, you will bring with you a rare knowledge of the world, of people, and of yourself.

There may be days of frustration and disappointment, but a lifetime of satisfaction as well. The courage, patience and fortitude you call upon helps you understand why Peace Corps is still the toughest job you'll ever love.