American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)
FY26 Appropriations Testimony
Prepared for the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
Regarding the Foreign Agricultural Service and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 bills, AFSA respectfully requests robust funding for the U.S. Foreign Service at the Department of Agriculture, specifically those at the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

The Foreign Service members at FAS and APHIS break down non-tariff barriers to trade, connect our exporters to foreign buyers, and facilitate the export sales that underpin U.S. crop prices and keep family farms afloat. Exports account for more than 20 percent of farm sales, and as the administration pursues its trade agenda, U.S. agriculture needs these Foreign Service members overseas collecting market intelligence, negotiating the details of regulatory access, keeping damaging pests like New World screwworm at bay, and helping U.S. exporters compete on a level playing field. These agencies are critical to the economic success of American family farms, contribute to global food security, and generate measurable returns for the U.S. economy.

However, our Foreign Service colleagues at the Department of Agriculture have already been strained by reduced staffing, increasing workloads, and budgets that have been outpaced by inflation for decades. At a time of increasing natural threats to American agricultural production, including highly pathogenic avian influenza, citrus greening disease, and the resurgence of New World screwworm, we need more agriculturally knowledgeable Foreign Service members in the field working with foreign governments to face threats before they reach our shores. When natural threats like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) close valuable export markets, we need trained Foreign Service members in the field to re-open those markets and get trade flowing again. FAS has lost 25 percent of its headquarters staff since January 2025, including employees in key technical and support roles. Recent Farm Bill proposals, including the House version of budget reconciliation, double funding for FAS market development programs to grow U.S. exports, while at the same time substantially increasing the workload of FAS Foreign Service members in the field. Cuts would exacerbate AFSA’s long-running concerns about inadequate information technology (IT) equipment, systems, and services for FAS and APHIS, making it even more difficult for our Foreign Service members to deliver the President's trade agenda.

FAS’s network of 95 overseas offices manages tens of thousands of contacts, including importers, distributors, retailers, and government officials, and hasn’t had basic off-the-shelf contact management software since 2006. While Foreign Service officers at the Commerce

Department have effectively used Salesforce for years, FAS can't afford enough software licenses for its overseas staff. FAS's internal financial and administrative software is a patchwork of legacy systems, which don't provide Foreign Service members with basic operational metrics, let alone tell Washington how many Foreign Service members are in the Service at any one time. To correct years of underfunding and prevent these agencies from falling further behind, AFSA requests FAS and APHIS receive a predictable and sufficient IT allocation in FY26. This would allow our members to receive mobile equipment and other necessary IT enhancements so they can meet the needs of their stakeholders more efficiently.

Currently, FAS has 115 overseas Foreign Service positions, which would require about 175 total officers to support a healthy career pattern of two-thirds of officers in the field and one-third in D.C. FAS had been rebuilding its Foreign Service bench over the last 10 years, after successful all-sources recruitment expanded the available talent pool. However, FAS had to withdraw 24 of 25 offers to entry-level Foreign Service candidates in January as the hiring freeze took effect. Excessive reliance on stretch positions, lack of time and support for language and other mandatory training, let alone elective in-service professional development opportunities, have driven an increased rate of attrition in recent years. AFSA is concerned that cuts to both services' Salaries and Expenses accounts would threaten the long-term viability of the FAS and APHIS Foreign Service.

Also, AFSA has been very supportive of the Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) and the Agricultural Trade Program investments that have helped exporters open and develop new markets. However, as RAPP is funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation, FAS cannot use the funds to implement the program (i.e., provide additional staff, IT support, or travel funds). For RAPP to truly serve U.S. exporters seeking to benefit from it, our members must be able to physically join them at the overseas marketplaces, providing introductions, market intelligence, fiduciary oversight, and foundational project support. AFSA is concerned about further reduction of overseas travel budgets, hampering our members' ability to deliver wins for U.S. industry more broadly, and ultimately undercutting RAPP's success.

Finally, AFSA is concerned that proposed FY26 cuts would result in a reduction in force (RIF) at the two agencies. AFSA asks the subcommittees to reject proposed cuts, as they would decimate the personnel and work of the Foreign Agricultural Service and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service at a time when their agricultural expertise is in greater demand than ever.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.