At first glance, a technical advisor with a degree in veterinary medicine may see like an unusual fit for a position in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance at USAID. But Shannon, with her background as an AAAS Fellow working on policy for the Feed the Future Initiative and her veterinary experience with livestock and small animals in Morocco, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and the US was in the right place at the right time. “I came to GHFP-II after talking with a former GHFP-II Fellow, Terry Wollen, who was in my current role at the time. The appeal of GHFP-II was the relationship that had been built with the office, making the role of the fellow one that was developed and had discernible responsibilities and duties,” Shannon notes. An MPH degree and a commitment to creating stronger international livestock connections in the veterinary community round out Shannon’s unique set of skills, education and experience.

As part of the OFDA, Shannon provides insight into how livestock and animal health can support the work. “...I have been a part of the Food Animal Systems Team, which works to encourage thoughtful investments in livestock programs throughout the Agency,” she says. Specifically, Shannon contributes to USAID’s goals in a number of ways. She serves as activity manager for the internationally recognized Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) handbook, one of the most significant livestock investments that OFDA makes, and she is responsible for ensuring that livestock and animal health related proposals submitted to OFDA in the aftermath of emergencies are technically sound and will provide the desired outcomes.

[This has been a] “...unique opportunity for a position pertaining to livestock, to utilize my technical expertise in an impactful way. Through my current position with

UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response Assessment Team. Photo courtesy of GHFP-II Fellow, Shannon Mesenhowski.

“Maintain your perspective with a healthy level of both curiosity and skepticism, and make a deliberate effort to be present.”
GHFP-II I have had the chance to be a part of a highly skilled team of technical experts, which otherwise would have been very challenging to find a way in to,” Shannon notes, “I am learning about a different part of USAID-OFDA which does not work with many fellowship mechanisms.”

In addition, Shannon has had a rare professional opportunity thanks to the broad scope of USAID OFDA’s work. “My work on the West Africa Ebola response has provided me with the chance to learn firsthand about the resilience of the human spirit, which is something that will provide motivation to continuously work harder and better for people impacted by our work. After spending four months in West Africa—which GHFP-II supported fully—working on Ebola, I have learned a tremendous amount about the true culture of the region,” Shannon says.

“As a part of the Technical Assistance Group, my fellowship was dependent on my technical skills and training as a public health veterinarian,” Shannon notes. “And GHFP-II was instrumental in providing the mechanism and guidance for creating this opportunity,” she says. “GHFP-II has supported the strengthening of my technical skills through professional development funds which have enabled me to attend conferences on continuing education requirements for my veterinary license, conferences and trainings in areas pertinent to my current role and future career potential such as a livestock and climate change research conference in Nepal,” Shannon notes.

Shannon has learned some valuable lessons in her career, among them: be sincere, maintain the ability to laugh, build up your friends and colleagues, and be willing to be uncomfortable. “One key lesson that I will hold on to for years to come,” she concludes, “is to make a conscious, deliberate effort to BE PRESENT. Keeping the big picture in mind and saying yes, if at all possible to any and all opportunities, has undoubtedly been the key to the experiences I have had in my fellowship. In my experience, maintaining a healthy level of both curiosity and skepticism has helped me from losing perspective in the sometimes overwhelming task at hand.”

A look at the work of USAID/OFDA

Response to the Earthquake in Nepal
The April 25, 2015 earthquake devastated communities located in the hill and mountain districts of Nepal. In response to this situation, USAID/OFDA’s Helping Earthquake-Affected Livestock in Nepal project (HEAL-Nepal) centers on preserving livelihood assets through restoration of disrupted livestock and veterinary services systems in five of the 14 districts most heavily impacted by the earthquakes.

From USAID/Nepal Facebook post July 21, 2015

Evaluating animal health and husbandry programs in Africa
In 2013, USAID/OFDA commissioned an evaluation to assess the impact of USAID/OFDA funded CAHW (Community Animal Health Workers) programs on animal health and husbandry practices, access to animal health services, and livelihoods in communities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan. It was revealed that CAHWs face a number of challenges, from inadequate drug and equipment supplied to transport constraints, as well as weak veterinary governance at national levels. The evaluation results also highlight best practices and lessons learned, to help guide humanitarian implementers and inform future activities.

From October 2014, USAID agriculture and food security sector update.

Promoting food security in Paraguay
The Guayaibí District is particularly vulnerable to harmful weather events. Ninety percent of Guayaibí’s rural population is involved in the agriculture, livestock, and poultry industries, all of which are negatively impacted by extreme weather conditions. To strengthen farmers’ capacity to adapt to drought conditions USAID/OFDA helped implement the Paraguay Resilience Program. The program increased farmers’ access to credit, allowing them to reduce household stocks. It also taught the farmers climate adaption strategies and improved agricultural techniques.

Update from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, January 2013