

Rozan Simoni

General Counsel – North America

COFCO International

In current position for: 5 years

Years in-house: 8 years

Law School: Washington University in St. Louis

Undergrad: St. Louis University (B.S. in Economics)

An overview of my role is:

I oversee all of the legal affairs of COFCO International in North America (USA, Canada and Mexico). I am member of the management team for the North America operations, and I also serve as corporate secretary. COFCO International is a global commodity trading company headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland – we source, process, trade and distribute grains & oilseeds, sugar, coffee, cotton and ethanol, reaching six continents, while employing 11,000 across the world, and collecting \$48 billion in revenue in 2022. In a given day, I might handle any or all of the following: contracts (trading and non-trading); HR matters, litigation or arbitration; compliance related to our facilities; real estate, M&A; financing transactions; corporate secretarial matters; drafting and implementing new company policies and procedures; developing or updating legal forms and processes; training; providing input on strategy as part of the regional management team; interact with various governmental or other regulatory agencies; solving various issues for my internal clients and various company stakeholders; handling administrative matters; and/or mentoring lawyers or law students.

Brief description of your past legal jobs:

I used to be an M&A and business lawyer with Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP. I went back to the law firm life after an in-house stint with a multinational company headquartered in Seville, Spain, with a global portfolio in green infrastructure, commodities, energy and water sectors. Prior to that, I was a business and real estate lawyer with Stinson LLP.

The best thing about my current job is:

Being part of a global company that makes sure key ingredients of our food products that are served daily at our dining table are distributed globally in a sustainable way.

The most challenging thing about my current job is:

How to be better prepared for business interruptions beyond our control (i.e. the pandemic; supply chain disruptions, etc.). One way to address such challenge is through timely and effective communication amongst teammates, which can lead to less business disruptions. For example, commodity traders prefer sitting next to each other in the office, and exchanging information in real time in order to discuss market conditions affecting trade strategy, pricing information, etc. However, during the pandemic, traders were isolated, as they had to work from home. It was not quite natural of them to pick up the phone and timely communicate an issue that may have arisen during a trade cycle. Before the pandemic, while in the office, it was easier to walk down the hall from their desk and knock on my door, chat about an issue that may have arisen, and try to find a solution right there and then. We continuously push each other on how to communicate better when working at our remote desks.

What I've accomplished as an in-house lawyer of which I'm most proud:

I built our North American legal department from the ground up, by being nimble and creative, and inventing the wheel. How did I do it? First, I developed the legal department's personality based on a simple mission: we serve the business by being a highly efficient deliverer of legal services in a professional, pragmatic and competent manner. To do that, I drew from the values of our company (integrity, inclusiveness, innovation and sustainability). I also jumped at the opportunity to learn from, and partner with, the business. We built processes, procedures, legal forms and policies, and developed relationships with internal and external stakeholders. We also grew, from a solo in-house practice, to three lawyers. Finally, we built an awesome externship program in collaboration with Washington University in St. Louis School of Law (my alma mater), hosting 14 students to date in our Chicago office in exchange for credit and mentorship. We teach them about our company operations, the agribusiness world, and, what it means to work in-house for a global company. While building a legal department from the ground up is challenging and time consuming, it is also rewarding, as you put your stamp on the design and the setup of it.

Advice I would give to new in-house lawyers:

Be a sponge. Learn the business. You need to develop a solid commercial awareness.

How has Covid-19 affected your professional and personal lives?

Profoundly, in more than one way: Positively - because we all know now that we can work effectively from home. Negatively - less in-person interactions with the world, which I think is a key aspect of forming successful relationships in life, which in turn improve your well-being.

What I like most about ACC's Chicago Chapter:

Friendliness of our colleagues - they are as warm and welcoming as they were 5 years ago, when I first joined the Chicago Chapter.

Most valuable life lesson that I still apply:

While it is prudent to plan for the future, one should appreciate the moment, and what life is offering us at the present.

If I were not practicing law, I would probably be:

A star soccer player.

My favorite book:

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck.

People may be surprised to learn:

That I speak Albanian and Italian.