

Primary Products Inspector	New South Wales (NSW)
ASCO Code: 3991-11	June 2008
Labour market rating	No shortage
Comment: <i>While there is no general shortage of qualified primary produce inspectors, in some specialisations there are emerging problems in recruiting sufficient trainees to meet wastage.</i>	

Occupational demand

Census data show that the occupation grew by a solid 3.7 per cent a year from 2001 to 2006. Demand for quarantine inspectors grew sharply after 2001 with higher funding under the Australian Government's Increased Quarantine Intervention initiative. Demand for non-meat produce inspectors servicing domestic production has been adversely affected by the prolonged drought affecting most of NSW. In contrast, demand for meat inspectors increased during the drought as farmers sent more stock for slaughter.

Occupational supply

Entry to the specialisation of quarantine inspector is via employment by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) followed by the completion of a twelve-month internal training program encompassing a Certificate III in Government. Meat inspectors are usually recruited from abattoir production workers who complete a Certificate IV in Meat Safety. The NSW Food Authority generally recruits graduates with a relevant degree or diploma as primary products inspectors due to its focus on auditing and compliance with food safety regimes. Due to the diversity of relevant training it is not possible to estimate a training rate for this occupation. However, supply to many of its specialisations is drawn from internal labour markets and appears to have risen in response to the increase in demand in recent years. Immigration is not a significant supply source to this occupation. Census data show a net loss of 37 primary products inspectors interstate and a gain of only 12 from overseas from 2001 to 2006. Employers reported a significant increase in retirements of meat inspectors in recent years. (The 2006 Census shows that 19 per cent of the occupation was in the 55-65 year age group compared with 13 per cent for the employed persons as a whole.) AQIS estimates the annual separation rate for quarantine inspectors at 5-10 per cent.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

The major public sector employers of this occupation reported no general problems in recruiting primary products inspectors. However, some regional vacancies were more difficult to fill and, in some specialisations, the recruitment of trainees with a suitable background had become more difficult with the fall in the general rate of unemployment. None of the abattoirs contacted for this report had advertised for meat inspectors in the previous six months as they recruit trainees from their production workers. The majority of contacts stated that they had few problems in training sufficient meat inspectors as there were more workers wishing to undertake the course than prospective positions for inspectors. A significant minority of employers, however, reported a problem in training adequate numbers of inspectors to meet increasing retirements in an aging occupation and the movement of inspectors to AQIS, which offered more secure employment and better remuneration and entitlements. Employers reported a high attrition rate from the AQF course which was often only available through distance education and was challenging for workers with limited academic experience. Nevertheless, the survey indicated that there was sufficient qualified staff to cover normal production levels, although some producers were left short of experienced inspectors to cover leave and additional shifts during peaks in production.

Labour market outlook

Supply of primary product inspectors from internal training and other sources should be adequate to meet demand in most specialisations over the short term. However, the projected medium-term increase in retirements of meat inspectors will necessitate a compensating increase in training.

[AQIS and the NSW Food authority reported no general problem in recruiting primary produce inspectors for the domestic production sector, although some regional vacancies were more difficult to fill. While AQIS reported some difficulty in recruiting sufficient trainee quarantine inspectors to cover workforce attrition due to the general tightening of the labour market and its stringent citizenship and security screening requirements, there is no significant shortage of qualified quarantine inspectors.]

Primary Products Inspector		Victoria
ASCO Code: 3991-11		March 2008
Labour market rating	No shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

The Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) defines primary product inspectors as persons who inspect animals, plants, agricultural produce and facilities to conform to government and industry standards. Also included in this ASCO definition are quarantine inspector and meat inspectors. In Victoria, over 68 per cent of primary products inspectors are employed in the government administration and defence sector. 2006 Census data suggests that 707 persons were employed as primary products inspectors in Victoria, an increase of 26 per cent over the number recorded in the 2001 Census.

Occupational supply

2006 Census data suggest the educational profile for employed primary products inspectors in Australia shows that about 21 per cent have bachelor degrees or above, 18.6 per cent have Advanced Diplomas or Diplomas, 27 per cent have Certificate III or IV and 14 per cent have no post-school qualifications. This broad spread of educational attainments suggest that there are several routes through which a person may take up the occupation of primary products inspector and furthermore that many employers may recruit unqualified staff and provide in-house training. Figures provided by DIIRD suggest that many VET courses such as Certificate IV in Meat Processing (Meat Safety and Quality Assurance) are completed by existing workers. DEEWR estimates the number of persons who completed entry level tertiary education which could lead to employment as a primary products inspector rose around 34 per cent in 2006, from 91 completions in 2005. Net immigration to Victoria of self-identified primary products inspector had no impact on supply to the profession.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A survey of employers who had recently advertised for primary product inspectors was undertaken for this report. However due to the difficulty finding advertised vacancies for positions specifically dealing with primary product inspection, survey data was supplemented with information collected from cold canvassing of government departments and organisations which deal with primary product quality control and inspection. The Survey of Employers who Recently Advertised (SERA) found that approximately 98 per cent of vacancies were filled with an average of over six suitable applicants and an average of more than 12 applicants per vacancy. Note however that these figures are based on limited employer numbers and are affected by the large number of applications. The minimum requirements were good communication skills, the aptitude to understand and apply regulations, the capacity to do shift work and have transport at all hours to work locations such as airports or wharves. Many employers were seeking people with meat industry experience to be trained in inspection. Tertiary qualifications in agriculture and related disciplines were also sought after. Experience in a regulatory environment was also valued.

Overall, the research indicates employers generally have little difficulty recruiting primary products inspectors. Contact with employers in the public sector agencies looking for quarantine inspectors advised that they usually recruited through bulk recruitment exercises and filled all their positions, with qualifications and experience required at the senior levels.

Labour market outlook

The limited evidence from the small survey undertaken and from discussions with employers suggest there are unlikely to be significant shortages of primary products inspectors in the next six months.

Primary Products Inspector		Queensland
ASCO Code: 3991-11	June 2008	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
<i>Comment: Shortages are most evident in regional Queensland.</i>		

Occupational demand

Primary products inspectors are responsible for examining animals, plants and agricultural produce in accordance with Australian government standards of hygiene, quality, import and export requirements. Specialisations include meat inspectors, quarantine inspectors or sugarcane analysts. Demand for this occupation is generated by domestic and global demand for Queensland's primary products. As an indicator of this demand, Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that the gross value of agricultural commodities in Queensland grew by four per cent or approximately \$340 million over the year to June 2007. Despite the growing use of automated inspections and some redistribution of quality control responsibilities from inspectors to production workers, demand for primary products inspectors has remained both constant and strong.

Occupational supply

Entry to this occupation is gained by completing a 'Food Science and Technology' or 'Laboratory Technology' course available at Southbank and Central Queensland respectively. Contacts from each institute reported that approximately 10 students commence and complete these courses per year. However, employers this year were willing to accept workers with any qualification as long as they had experience in the industry and it is common practice that quarantine officers attain certificate level qualifications after being trained on the job. Data from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship show an average of only three primary products inspectors migrating to Queensland each year. However, Census data show an increase of 60 persons each year to the workforce which suggests a possible role for interstate migration.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

After multiple advertising, 35 per cent of the vacancies for primary products inspectors were filled within six weeks of advertising. Employers deemed 84 per cent of applicants as unsuitable because they did not have adequate qualifications or relevant industry experience. Employers received moderate interest from overseas but they did not give these candidates serious consideration because the duration of the immigration process generally falls beyond the immediate needs of their businesses. Most regional employers, especially those located in Central Queensland, did not fill their vacancies and attribute much of their difficulty to the elevated cost of regional housing and the loss of potential applicants and existing workers to quality assurance positions in the mineral resources sector. Despite all efforts, one respondent continues to hold a vacancy that has remained unfilled for more than three years. Most also reported that they were paying well above award wages with some offering in-house promotions, interstate transfers and flexible rosters, but they are unable to compete with the remuneration offered in the mineral resources sector. Contacts from the sugar industry reported a declining supply of new graduates and shortages of qualified workers together with a request for the reintroduction of sugar specific TAFE courses to help meet demand. Meat industry contacts eventually filled vacancies by accepting extensive industry experience in lieu of qualifications while plant and stock businesses filled their positions without difficulty.

Labour market outlook

Demand for primary products is expected to continue to rise in line with population growth and the subsequent domestic and global demand for Queensland's primary products. While there maybe some contribution to supply coming from interstate migration employers this year reported an acute shortage of new supply from education and there is significant wastage from the occupation to the mineral resources sector. The current State-wide shortage of primary products inspectors in Queensland is therefore likely to continue and as demand rises, the shortage will intensify.

Primary Products Inspector	Western Australia
ASCO Code: 3991-11	March 2008
Labour market rating:	No shortage
Comment	

Occupational demand

In WA, most primary products inspectors work for the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food in a division known as Quarantine WA that provides plant, fruit and vegetable health certification. Inspectors provide documentation for produce leaving WA as well as quarantine services for product entering the State. The Department of Agriculture and Food also employs bio-security officers to manage and cull intruding species that become a threat to crops. Employment demand is in part driven by threats of agricultural pests and infestations. At the federal level, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service provides inspection, verification and certification services to the export meat, dairy, fish, grain and horticulture industries in Australia. It also provides foreign border protection by employing agricultural product inspectors at Australian entry points. Positions are advertised fairly regularly by the two public service bodies.

Occupational supply

To fill the role of primary products inspector a person must have demonstrated experience or qualifications in agriculture, horticulture or bio-security as well as experience in application of regulations or applying legislation or formal dealing with regulatory organisations. These skills need to be in combination. Qualifications may be at the levels of degree, horticultural tradesperson, diploma, or TAFE level certificates. Applicants also need to display computer literacy and be comfortable with the application of technology in the workplace. Because employment is predominantly by the government sector, Australian citizenship and police clearance may be requirements of employment.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A survey of employers who had recently advertised for primary products inspectors showed 100 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. There were 10 applicants per vacancy of whom about 2 per vacancy were considered by employers to be suitable. Unsuitable applicants were seen to lack the qualifications and experience requirements. Both the State and Federal Departments report that staff need to wear a uniform at work, represent government as an Officer, be prepared to issue documentation and enforce and apply aspects of the relevant laws. Many of the inspection positions are at the Perth Airport and at Perth's major fruit and vegetable wholesale distribution markets. One major employer reported that each time they advertise they can expect around 100 applications. The timing of this recruitment depends upon the seasonal peaks, such as grain harvest times. Work is often contract based and for limited periods at various shipping ports as well as offshore territories. It was also reported that the primary products inspectors may also be responsible for native plant and animal protection and environmental protection from introduced disease, weeds and foreign animals and therefore staff are required to live in country towns, rural and sometimes remote locations. Local people with inspection and surveillance skills are often recruited for these roles.

Labour market outlook

Due to ongoing threats from agricultural pests and disease as well as the requirement for a range of certifications of products, regular recruitment for positions in both the State and Federal government agencies can be expected to continue at the current rate.

Primary Products Inspector		Tasmania
ASCO Code: 3991-11	April 2008	
Labour market rating	No shortage	
Comment		

Occupational demand

There were 98 primary products inspectors recorded at the 2006 Census, slightly down on the 109 recorded in 2001. Almost 75 per cent of primary products inspectors work for the public sector in Tasmania, with small numbers in the private sector fragmented across the meat industry, transport industry and agriculture industry, according to 2006 Census data.

The major demand factors for primary product inspectors are related to levels of regulation surrounding the packing, movement and storage of plant and animal produce. The occupation is also male dominated at 70 per cent, according to 2006 Census data. Primary products inspectors working for the State Government (around 42 per cent of the occupation in Tasmania) work in the areas of meat, seafood and egg inspections to ensure compliance with food safety regulations. Those working for the Federal Government (around 30 per cent of the occupation) work in the quarantine service ensuring that primary produce coming in and going out of the State meet the required safety and health standards, and are free of pests and diseases.

Occupational supply

Primary products inspectors in the meat inspection areas are required to have a food safety auditing qualification approved by industry. In general, food inspection qualifications endorsed by Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Australia, and food safety auditing endorsed by certification company RABQSA are those held by primary products inspectors. In the public sector, people are recruited as technical staff at entry level, and then have the opportunity to train on the job to progress to the level of food safety auditing. There are also a small number of staff who have a Certificate IV in meat inspection, as that is their main area of activity. Quarantine staff, although technically Federal Government employees, are actually based in, and paid by a State Government agency.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

No employers advertised for primary products inspectors in the lead up to this report. However, other industry sources contacted indicated that they generally did not have any recruitment problems, in that they had significant numbers of applicants when they advertised their entry level positions. This then forms the pool from which they recruit and train staff for the next level. Some industry sources did state they felt there were shortages in the sense that there were not enough positions being funded to deal with all the available work. This was more an issue of levels of government funding however, rather than existing positions not being filled.

Labour market outlook

Primary products inspectors make up a very small occupation in Tasmania, dominated by public sector employment, and characterised by on the job training to raise skills to the required level. Unless there is a significant unexpected increase in demand, the occupation is expected to remain in balance for at least the next 12 months.