

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.]