

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.