

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1967 FEDERAL MEAT INSPECTION ACT  
U.S.D.A. VIEWPOINT

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The new Federal Meat Inspection Act which was enacted into law this past December 15 provides the necessary tools to establish with all the States a truly national Meat Inspection Program -- a program that will ultimately assure a totally inspected meat supply for the American public. It provides for broader consumer protection authority within the traditional interstate commerce concept. It also provides for full intrastate protection through authority for Federal assistance to the States for the purpose of developing and strengthening State inspection programs to that point -- where as the law expresses -- they are at least equal to the Federal program. This must be achieved by 1970.

USDA can assist the States through furnishing advisory assistance in planning, developing, and implementing State programs; by providing technical, laboratory, and training assistance, and finally by contributing up to 50 percent of the State program costs. Approximately \$14 million has been budgeted in fiscal year 69 for payment by USDA to the States under the Wholesome Meat Act. This aid to the States is contingent on their laws meeting necessary minimal requirements; e.g., imposing mandatory ante-mortem, post-mortem, sanitary and reinspection requirements on their intrastate meat plants and their cooperation in the development of an improvement plan for their State programs.

At this time we have signed the Wholesome Meat Act cooperative agreement with 16 States and have completed much of the preliminary work necessary for signing with about 12 more.

We feel we are really on our way toward reaching our objective of a truly cooperative relationship with the States in implementing the new law.

The Act also provides for the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint Advisory Committees consisting of State representatives to consult with him on matters within the scope of the Act. A 17-member National Advisory Committee on Meat Inspection has been appointed. The Committee is definitely a "working" Committee, meeting monthly. It has studied and discussed many details for implementing the new law. It has made recommendations concerning activities in the following areas:

- (1) Product Standards, Labeling and Marks of Inspection.
- (2) Administrative, Fiscal and Training Activities.
- (3) Laboratory Services.
- (4) Legal Interpretation and Regulations.

The States not represented directly on the Advisory Committee also have the opportunity to assist in formulating policy, through direct contacts with members of the Administrator's staff. As appropriate policies and regulations are generated, they are to be forwarded to the meat inspection official in each State so he can review and comment on them prior to any changes in regulations and procedures.

The Act gives USDA broader consumer protection authority in the area of enforcement, especially in the control of illicit operations. It allows us to check on any members of those allied industries that could be the source of diverting unfit meats into human food channels. This authority imposes a requirement for registration, recordkeeping, and inventory review on such firms as meat brokers, wholesalers, renderers, animal and pet food producers, as well as those who also handle, transport and slaughter, incommerce, dead, dying, diseased and disabled livestock. Federal assistance to States will be provided for in this area also.

We now have detention and seizure authority which enables us to control meat and meat food products that are moving illegally, or which have become adulterated or misbranded outside of official premises. Thirty-five detentions involving over 100,000 pounds of products have been made since the law was enacted December 15, 1967.

The new law extended Federal meat inspection to boners and cutters who do an interstate business. Meat products were often subjected to insanitary conditions and otherwise adulterated in such plants which were not federally inspected under the old law. Five hundred and forty-three of these plants have been brought under inspection since December 1967.

The new law also eliminated the "exemption" under which about 550 businesses conducted small, essentially retail interstate meat operations. Two hundred seventy-four of these plants are now operating under Federal inspection.

The Meat Inspection Program, in the years to come, will be a more scientifically oriented Program. We have and will continue to develop a number of statistical procedures for inspection. We have and will continue to strengthen our chemical and bacteriological lab and staff capabilities for support in assuring compliance of meat food products with regulations. Much more will be done in this area.

Preventive sanitation will be an important part of the new nationally uniform Meat Inspection Program. Meat processing plants must be clean, inside and out, and must provide a suitable environment for preparing food. Regular sanitation checks and reports are essential. Operators must take responsibility for cleanup before operations are permitted. You of the American Meat Science Association can and do contribute much to this important aspect of meat production.

Our objective is to eliminate salmonella and other pathogens from the food supply. Certainly this will take a great amount of research and improvement in food processing and handling techniques. Perhaps one day bacterial standards for meat products will become a reality.

Waste disposal from meat packing plants is an important matter since only about 65 percent of each animal is usable for food purposes. We have cooperated with State and local officials to obtain their approval of plant disposal systems before inspection is started. However, changes in plant operations as well as changes in personnel and policies at State and local levels have sometimes resulted in development of problems. We are very much concerned that waste disposal is handled in such a way that it does not create a nuisance or otherwise pollute the environment.

As authorized in the Wholesome Meat Act, foreign meat inspection review activities have been stepped up. We have increased our foreign review team of veterinarians from 6 to 13. This year we will visit each plant that is approved to send meat to the United States. The application of inspection standards in these plants must be the same as in U. S. plants -- with the continuous inspection being performed by employees of the foreign government's national meat inspection program. The law requires that we prepare a detailed annual report to Congress on the results of our foreign inspection review program. Port of entry inspection has also been made more rigid.

The Federal requirements relating to facilities and equipment for meat plants have been getting much attention--particularly by those required to operate under inspection for the first time. There has been some confusion about U. S. minimum standards. Many people have incorrectly used the Handbook No. 191 as an example of the minimum requirements. This book is a guide to practical packinghouse construction, and in many cases it presents the optimal rather than the minimal standards. We plan to have available in the very near future the minimum facility standards for the Federal Meat Inspection Program so they will be readily available for those who are interested. These are not new standards but are a collection of the standards which now appear in Federal Meat Inspection Regulations. We must apply these standards with a rule of reason to meet the needs of that segment of the industry that has limited operations and resources, but can, however, provide a sanitary environment that is conducive to the production of wholesome meats.

Another law which we are using to initiate cooperative inspection with the States is the Talmadge-Aiken Law. This law was passed in 1962. A cooperative agreement under this law allows USDA to approve and license State inspection personnel to perform Federal meat inspection.

We reimburse the State for 50 percent of the cost of their services. The plants under this program are, in fact, under Federal inspection with the State inspector carrying out Federal rules and regulations.

This agreement can be entered into by States without their having enacted a mandatory meat inspection law. It helps the States to keep their programs intact and prevents erosion of State responsibility in inspection.

It is helpful also as a means to assist the States in training and gaining uniformity between the Federal and State programs. At this time, we have entered into the Talmadge-Aiken agreement with 19 States and have 41 establishments inspected under provisions of this agreement.

The need for qualified meat inspection personnel has increased with passage of the Wholesome Meat Act. We look to you of the meat science

departments to assist us in this area. I know of several of your recent graduates that have taken positions in newly organized State inspection systems. We have a couple of your graduates in our Product Standard's Group. We encourage you to further develop your curriculum to include courses that are devoted specifically to meat hygiene.

In the six months that have passed, most of the States have made excellent progress. I am confident that we will reach our ultimate goal of developing a unified State and Federal meat inspection system that will provide all consumers with meat and meat food products that are healthful, wholesome, free from adulteration, and informatively labeled.

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MAX JUDGE: Thank you Dr. Steinmetz. We are going to provide opportunity for a processor to express his viewpoint. Mr. J. A. Beavers is the immediate past president of NIMPA; he is the past president of the Georgia Independent Meat Packers' Association as well; but today he is speaking to us as president of Beavers Packing Company, down in Newnan, Georgia, and so I think we are fortunate to have someone who is intimately associated with the processing of meat to discuss this important legislation with us. Mr. Beavers.

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