

# How to Become a U.S. Food and Drug Inspector

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\* Editor's note: this article was published approximately 50 years before FDA swore in the first female food and drug inspector.

Exceedingly few people outside of the limited number of employees in the Bureau of Chemistry, Department of Agriculture, have a substantially correct conception of the organization, work, duties and efficiency of the national corps of United States Food and Drug Inspectors--the official guardians of each citizen's "department of interior." Even less are aware of the fact that these positions are more remunerative, more dignified, more interesting, and more instructive than almost any other in the federal civil service field.



Among the numerous and unusual advantages offered, may be mentioned the following: A big initial salary with fine prospects for promotion; liberal expenses while traveling; exceptional opportunities for extensive traveling; frequent and intimate contact, both professional and social, with successful men of recognized standing in the commercial, scientific and legal spheres particularly, such as presidents and other officers of corporations, leading manufacturers, U. S. District Attorneys, judges, noted scientific experts, etc.

A considerable portion of the Inspector's time is spent out of doors, which fact, together with the great variety of duties involved, makes the work quite healthful and pleasant. The vast field which is covered by the Food and Drugs Act of 1906, is decidedly broadening in its effect on the mind and personality of the inspector, putting the finishing touches or polish to his education, as it were.

As the duties of an Inspector are many and varied, covering a tremendous field, and as every day's work presents new conditions, new problems, different people and different environments, it will easily be perceived that he has little cause to complain of monotonous or routine work. The experience and training of a United States Food and Drug Inspector is looked upon by competent and judicious critics as a valuable practical course in the best university of the

Universe--the university of life's activities, and the degree conferred by this university spells "Success" in later life.

Think of receiving at the hands of the government practical training in typewriting, correspondence, photography, bookkeeping, methods of transportation, traveling, court-work, the art of interviewing, general business methods, the collection of evidence, detective work, the great art of studying and understanding human nature, to say nothing of the amazingly vast field embracing the manufacturing, sale and transportation of an inconceivable number of foods, drugs and liquors. If such an experience does not make a "man" of any one, it is difficult to imagine what would. It surely will qualify the incumbent to successfully fill any one of a dozen or more positions in later life.

It is a significant fact, surprising as it may seem, that there are no more than forty-five Inspectors throughout this immense territory of ninety million souls. In other words, the welfare of ninety million stomachs, the most vital organs of so many proud owners scattered over an area of over three million square miles--is officially permitted to be in the hands of a handful of men--forty-five, making it incumbent on one official to look after two million beings--a shameful and precarious state of affairs. Not much effective work can be accomplished under present circumstances. The people of this country need several times the number of Inspectors now employed. Every conscientious citizen who believes in wholesome food, fit for human beings, should earnestly, vigorously, and persistently advocate, fight for, and demand a considerable increase in the present diminutive force.

## **OFFICE OF CHIEF INSPECTOR**

The corps of forty-five Inspectors, under a Chief Inspector, who reports directly to the Chief of Bureau, has headquarters at Washington, and the Inspectors receive their directions from and make their reports to the Chief Inspector at that point. The taking of samples for analysis constitutes their chief duty, though special investigations in collaboration with the chemists are also made, and factories where articles of food or drugs are prepared, are also inspected. The Chief Inspector has an assistant who visits the various stations throughout the country from time to time in a supervisory capacity, suggesting improvements, criticizing and reporting confidentially to the Chief Inspector, whose place he assumes during the illness or absence of the latter.

## **DUTIES OF AN INSPECTOR**

To put it in general and concise terms, the duty of a United States Food and Drug Inspector is to assist in the enforcement of the Food and Drugs Act of June 30, 1906, by collecting samples of products embraced in that act for analysis, collecting evidence of the interstate shipment of such products, and pave the way for the complex machinery of the Department to successfully prosecute violations of said Federal law.

More specifically, the primary duties of an Inspector are:

(1) To inspect the stock of foods, drugs, liquors, condiments and confectionery in the warehouses of manufacturers, jobbers and dealers (generally wholesale, but occasionally retail) with the object of locating such products as have been or are about to be transported in interstate commerce and are adulterated or misbranded within the meaning of the Food and Drugs Act of 1906.

(2) To purchase and collect samples of above products, packing them properly and forwarding them to a United States Food Laboratory for analysis.

(3) To collect original, or copies of, records, such as freight bills, bills of lading, invoices and other written or oral evidence tending to establish the interstate shipment of products covered by such records.

(4) To confer with United States District Attorneys, United States Marshals and other Government officials relative to the seizure, destruction or sale of adulterated, misbranded, poisonous or rotten products, or the prosecution of any violator of the law.

(5) To accompany the United States Marshal in seizure proceedings, especially with a view to assisting him in the proper identification of the commodity.

(6) To act as a witness for the government at trials involving any violation of the national food law.

(7) To interview dealers, manufacturers, experts, etc., in behalf of the government and solicit their views on any particular subject for the benefit of the Department.

(8) To do detective work, such as surveilling factories of questionable repute, following up wagons or other conveyances suspected of carrying adulterated or misbranded foods its interstate commerce.

(9) To investigate and report on the condition of industries in a particular locality, such as the maple sugar industry in New York or Vermont, the citrus fruit industry in Italy, etc.

Some of the incidental but necessary tasks of Federal Inspectors are as follows: Hunting up boxes and other shipping containers, excelsior, nails, hammer, marking crayon and other promiscuous paraphernalia necessary for the proper packing and shipping of samples; carrying samples from the dealer's place to the express or post office; photographing labels on containers having food products of questionable wholesomeness; tracing labels on the cover of a barrel; typewriting letters; breaking into freight cars to get a sample of the contents; disguising as a laborer or "hobo" so as to facilitate the getting of employment in an establishment suspected of doing "dirty work," as in the case of the horse-meat sausage factory.

Every inspector is assigned to a particular city which is considered his official station or permanent headquarters and is the central or principal point of the territory covered by him during the year. Stations have from one to four Inspectors according to the size of the city and the commercial activity of the surrounding territory, particularly as regards the manufacturing,

selling and interstate transportation of foods and drugs. Stations in cities like Buffalo, Louisville and Cincinnati, for instance, each have only one man, whereas New York, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, etc., have each from three to four Inspectors, one of whom is known as the "Inspector-in-Charge."

The time spent on the road by each Inspector, varies according to the general nature of the territory within his jurisdiction and the business conditions prevailing at a particular time. On the average, it may be stated, that each Inspector travels five months of the year, during which time he is allowed \$4.25 per day for board, lodging and personal expenses besides his regular salary, which varies from \$1,400 to \$2,500 per annum, and his transportation expenses.

The regular hours for work are from 9 A. M. to 4:30 P. M. on week-days and from 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. on Saturdays, except in Washington, where the time is prolonged to 4 P. M. on Saturdays. While these are the actual hours of service ordinarily, the inspector is under a technical obligation to work at any time that the exigencies of unforeseen or special circumstances may demand.

The day's work is usually begun by reading and answering the mail and mapping out the work for the day. Should a communication in the form of a letter, telegram or long distance telephone be received from the Chief Inspector at Washington requesting an investigation of a particular matter or the performance of some special task, such an order would precede all other work the Inspector might have contemplated. In the absence of any such assignment to a special duty, our "pure food guardian" will sally forth on his usual inspection tour, visiting wholesale grocers and druggists, factories, spice and grain mills, packing houses, docks, wharves, railroad freight depots and every other locality where he is likely to find food and drug products that have been or will be transported in interstate commerce.

## **METHOD OF PROCEDURE**

On locating a questionable consignment that is to be shipped *out* to another state, territory or the District of Columbia, the Inspector makes a note of the name and address of the consignor (he who forwards the goods), the name and address of the consignee (he to whom the goods are being forwarded), the quantity or size of the shipment and the label on the shipping container. He will then forward such information to the office of the Chief Inspector as well to the official station nearest to the point of destination of such a consignment, after which the products in question will be followed up and sampled after delivery to consignee.

On the other hand, if the consignment of adulterated, misbranded, poisonous or decayed food, was sent *from* an outside state, territory or the District of Columbia, the Inspector will proceed to collect an official sample of such unwholesome food as follows: (1) He will break open one or more "original, unbroken" packages and get a representative sample or one representing the average condition of the greater part of the products. (2) He will pay for said sample whatever price the dealer may demand and will request the dealer to sign a receipt for such purchase price. This receipt also states that the dealer identifies the goods sampled as a shipment covered by submitted (original or copy of) invoice, and submitted (original or copy of) shipping memorandum, which statement is intended to aid the Government in proving that the shipment

of the products sampled was an interstate one. (3) He will obtain the original or copies of the invoice and shipping memorandum such as freight bill or bill of lading. (4) He will take a photograph, tracing or copy of the label on the original, unbroken shipping package from which he took the sample. (5) He will be careful not to leave the sample out of his possession and personal care, as he will be held responsible for same from the moment he takes it. (6) He will carefully pack such sample, after making three or more subdivisions, and forward it to some United States Food Laboratory for analysis. (7) He will submit the records collected to the Chief Inspector as well as a "report on collection," a copy of which he will keep.

Should the chemist's analysis reveal a violation of the Food and Drugs Act, any one of several courses may be pursued by the Department. The manufacturer or dealer responsible for the violation may be called upon for a hearing before the Board of Food and Drug Inspection, when he will be given an opportunity to explain. Should he explain to the satisfaction of that august body that the apparent violation was accidental, unavoidable or otherwise excusable, the matter can be speedily and satisfactorily adjusted. If no satisfactory and convincing excuse is offered, the Department may resort to litigation, and if successful may attach or seize the goods pending trial, destroy, sell, or return them to the defendant provided he put up a bond that he will properly modify the label or remanufacture the products or otherwise conform to the Federal Law. It is very rarely that the Department resorts to prosecution against the person of an offender, so that exceedingly few, if any, defendants have been sentenced to imprisonment. The most prevalent punishment meted out to offenders is in the form of a moderate fine. Keen rivalry exists among the Inspectors as to who can obtain the greatest number of seizures.

A successful Inspector should possess, besides the necessary qualifications for eligibility, such assets as judgment, initiative, tact and energy. He should be diplomatic, keenly observant, a good "mixer," a patient and silent listener and a practical student of human nature and business affairs.

There is no doubt that our country has a considerable number of ambitious youths endowed with the above invaluable qualities who could do much in their official capacity as Federal Inspectors to improve sanitary conditions prevailing in our present food and drug factories and promote the welfare and well-being of ninety million bodies by insuring them wholesome, nutritious and fresh articles of diet.

While the excellent personnel of the present force of Food and Drug Inspectors and the spirit of aggressiveness and fearlessness displayed by the men, is a compliment to the Department of Agriculture, particularly to Secretary Houston and Chief Carl L. Alsberg, it is nevertheless to be deeply regretted that Congress does not recognize and act upon the fact that their exceedingly limited number necessarily hampers and restricts the effectiveness of their work, upon which depends to so great an extent the health and welfare of the American public.

## **HOW TO BECOME A UNITED STATES FOOD AND DRUG INSPECTOR**

While no definite announcement has yet been issued by the United States Civil Service Commission relative to the holding of an examination for the position of United States Food and Drug Inspector, there is nevertheless good cause to assert that an examination for this position will be held within a year, and it is strongly advisable for all ambitious candidates to begin their

preparation now as at least a year's preparation is quite essential to the securing of a place on the eligible list.

Qualifications for Eligibility.--Applicants possessing any *one* of the following qualifications will be eligible to take the examination and for appointment:

- (a) Practical experience in an establishment manufacturing or dealing in foods, drugs, liquors or confectionery.
- (b) Traveling experience as a representative of a food, drug, liquor or a confectionery concern.
- (c) Completion of a course in the adulteration of foods and drugs.
- (d) Completion of a course in chemistry.
- (e) Completion of a course in medicine or pharmacy.
- (f) Possession of the degree of M.D. or Ph.G.