

## **The Meat Inspection Process**

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Meat inspection is regulated by the government to ensure that meat is wholesome and safe to eat. All meat that is sold must, by law, be inspected. Regulations for the meat industry are administered by the United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, otherwise known as the USDA FSIS. Currently, it is estimated that meat inspection costs each consumer 13 cents per month.

Prior to 1967, inspection for small meat plants varied depending on the city and state where the plant was located. To standardize inspection programs, the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967 was passed. Individual states were given the opportunity to develop inspection programs that met or exceeded regulations established by the federal government. If a state chose not to set up an inspection program, the USDA FSIS assumed all meat inspection responsibilities within the state. Kansas is one of 27 states that elected to set up a state inspection program.

In Kansas, state meat inspectors are required to have a minimum of two years of college concentrating on agricultural and biological sciences or at least two years of meat industry experience. They must also pass a USDA training course that is held in Texas. Once these requirements are met, the state inspector is assigned to inspect several plants within an area.

Animals are inspected for signs of disease before and after slaughter. The inspector relies on a veterinarian's judgment in those instances where there is a health or wholesomeness question. Extreme attention is paid to produce a carcass free of contamination. To assure the sanitary handling of meat and meat products, the sanitation of equipment, buildings and grounds are also inspected. An inspector has the authority to have condemned products destroyed to prevent their use for human food.

An inspection stamp is put on large cuts of meat or meat products to assure consumers that the product was wholesome when it was shipped from the plant where the meat was inspected. Every plant that is inspected has a unique, individual identification number. This number can be found as part of the round inspection stamp on meat labels. An edible ink is used to apply inspection stamps on fresh meat.

Before any ingredient can be used in a processed meat product, it must be approved by the USDA FSIS. Some meat products must meet government standards of identity before the product can be sold. For example, beef stew must contain at least 25 percent beef. All meat labels are reviewed to insure the information presented on the label is accurate. These are only a few of the many regulations that must be followed to produce meat and meat products.