

Auditor
GS-0511-12

INTRODUCTION

The Packers and Stockyards Programs (P&SP) administers the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 (Act), as amended. The Act is a fair trade practice and financial protection law that promotes fair and competitive marketing environments for the livestock, meat, and poultry industries. Members of the livestock, meat, and poultry industries are also protected against unfair or monopolistic practices of competitors. The Act also protects consumers against unfair business practices in the marketing of meats and against restrictions on competition that could unduly raise meat prices.

The Act requires that stockyard companies, auction markets, livestock market agencies, livestock dealers, meat packers, poultry processors, and live poultry dealers, whose operations are subject to the Act, maintain such records that will disclose in detail all transactions involved in their business including their true ownership. P&SP makes periodic and special examinations of reports and records of persons and firms subject to the Act in order to ascertain whether they are operating in full compliance with the Act.

Regional offices are responsible for carrying out assigned functions and activities in enforcement of the provisions of the Act and regulations issued under its authority in assigned geographic regions.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. General Overview

Serves as an Auditor in the regional office primarily by enforcement of financial provisions of the Act. Conducts investigations, financial and operational audits, and related activities pertaining to large and complex operations. Incumbent assists in formal proceedings. Serves as a mentor to less experienced auditor staff.

Carries out activities of the Financial Unit of the regional office in order to effectively integrate the unit's responsibilities with those of the other work units within the office. Assures work product is relative to program objectives and work is timely completed. Reviews work product of less experienced auditor staff.

B. Investigations

Independently, or as a leader of an auditing team, plans, designs, organizes, and/or conducts complex financial and operational audits of large and diverse or financially unstable registrants, packers, and live poultry dealers operating within the region and subject to the Act.

Conducts investigations of firms suspected of being or known to be in violation of the financial

provisions of the Act that are likely to be of a sensitive, controversial, or precedent setting nature.

Examines financial and operating records to determine evidence of insolvency, unlawful payment practices, improper use of shippers' funds, inadequacy of working capital, inadequacy of bond, improper assessment of tariff charges, inappropriateness of charges to depreciation reserve, and noncompliance with orders and stipulations. Reviews previous audit reports, formal orders and stipulations, and annual and special reports submitted by subject persons or firms to determine if financial practices and conditions are in compliance with requirements of the Act.

As the leader of a team project, provides advice and guidance on the audit methodology, monitors the technical accuracy, and reviews the analysis, concepts, and conclusions upon completion of the audit. Assists in the training of new technical employees hired by the Agency.

Prepares comprehensive audit reports of investigation findings.

Makes recommendations concerning immediate remedial measures required and recommendations concerning official administrative action such as cease and desist orders, suspension of registration, and civil penalties whenever violations of the Act are discovered.

Integrates the region's audit program and activities with the overall investigative work of the office. The audit phase of investigations involves the detection and correction of financial and operating practices of the livestock, meat, and poultry industries that result in violations of the Act. Such investigations have the objective of preventing any unfair, discriminatory, or deceptive practice in connection with the financial responsibilities of packers, market agencies, or dealers in the marketing of livestock, meat and meat food products, and live poultry. Such practices are frequently of a very subtle nature involving two or more representative segments of the livestock, meat, poultry, and meat marketing systems and are often interstate in scope.

Develops procedures for handling financial complaints received from livestock shippers and other members of the livestock, poultry, and meat marketing industries. The transactions complained of are varied in nature and frequently quite complex. They involve a multitude of financial irregularities and practices related to purchases and sales of livestock, poultry, and meat. Develops and directs the investigations necessary to ascertain the true circumstances surrounding the transactions giving rise to such complaints. Evaluates the facts developed to determine whether the complaint is justified. The incumbent's report and recommendations become a part of the record of the formal administrative proceeding.

Works closely with the Senior Auditor and Financial Unit Supervisor in the preparation of regional office audit plans, schedules, and in the development and application of audit procedures.

Provides technical direction to less experienced auditors in the regional office and to State officials engaged in Federal-State cooperative enforcement activities. Occasionally works with other government agencies in planning and conducting investigations.

As time permits or as workload demands, the incumbent performs other duties as assigned.

C. Formal Proceedings

Works with Legal Specialists and Department attorneys in conducting investigations, preparing investigative reports, compiling evidence, and preparing proposed complaints for use in formal

litigation. Assists in preparing material for use in questioning witnesses. Represents the Agency in formal proceedings as a witness, testifying as to the financial aspects of the investigation and identifying violations of the Act.

Prior to the hearing, the incumbent frequently assists attorneys in the office of the General Counsel or Department of Justice in the assimilation of the evidence, determination of proposed findings, conclusions, and recommended order. Incumbent assists in the preparation of exhibits and other basic materials requisite to the preparation and presentation of the case.

Serves as a technical expert in reviewing and resolving financial report and audit issues specific to the investigation.

D. Policy Interpretation and Application

Explains the basis and application of new and existing auditing practices, policies, and regulations to producers and farm groups, persons in the regulated industries, and to State officials. This requires explanation of the basis in law for such policies, as well as their relevance to the overall objectives of administration of the Act. These educational efforts are designed to prevent violations by informing persons and firms subject to the Act of its jurisdiction, provisions, and requirements.

As directed, the incumbent makes oral and written presentations describing investigation procedures and results, and relevant developments to other interested Agency personnel.

Attends meetings and addresses State and regional industry associations to explain the provisions of the Act and policies of the Agency. Attends meetings of government officials to discuss mutual interests. Confers with company officials and other industry representatives as necessary.

FACTOR LEVELS

1. Knowledge Required by the Position - Professional knowledge of accounting and auditing theory, practices, methods, and techniques in order to independently perform complex financial and operational audits of firms in the livestock, meat, and poultry industries.

Skill in developing audit plans and devising and applying modifications to conventional audit techniques in order to carry out audits of firms in different segments of the industry which characteristically use varying and unconventional accounting systems and financial practices.

Knowledge of Agency programs, the Act, regulations, policy statements, rules of practice, and controlling administrative and judicial decisions in order to determine the firms' compliance with the financial-protection and related provisions of the Act, reasonableness of operations, and adherence to accepted accounting principles and management practices.

Incumbent must possess skills in verbal and written communication in order to plan, direct and conduct investigations, prepare and present findings, and effectively support recommendations on significant or controversial issues.

Incumbent must have the ability to use Agency computer programs to create and use spreadsheets, databases, graphs, and charts, and perform word processing functions.

Knowledge of the livestock, meatpacking, and poultry industries.

2. Supervisory Controls - The incumbent is under the general supervision of the Financial Unit Supervisor who provides administrative and broad program supervision. The Financial Unit Supervisor discusses the availability of less experienced auditors to be assigned to a team under the direction of the incumbent, other resources available and approximate time lines. Priorities regarding the concerted enforcement of certain problem areas of particular concern to the Agency are relayed to the incumbent through the Financial Unit Supervisor. Technical guidance in the form of possible approaches to very unusual or sensitive problems is available from Senior Auditors and Financial Unit Supervisor.

As a team leader, plans and carries out the assignment and directs the work of other auditors. Coordinates the work with office employees engaged in other phases of the investigation, resolves most of the conflicts that arise, and develops changes to the audit plan and audit methodology. Keeps the supervisor informed of progress, potentially controversial findings of violations of the Act and alerts the supervisor of practices discovered in the audit which may be present in other regions or which may impact upon other Agency programs. Work is reviewed for soundness of overall approach, compatibility with intended objectives, feasibility of recommendations, and to ensure that incumbent achieves maximum use of allocated resources.

3. Guidelines - Guidelines consist of generally accepted accounting principles, previous audit reports, audit plans, Employee Manual, the Act, regulations, policy statements, rules of practice, and formal orders and stipulations. The guidelines are useful in providing a framework or principles upon which the incumbent develops plans for carrying out the work. The myriad of financial and operating practices of the wide variety of firms engaged in the several distinct segments of the livestock, meat, and poultry industries reflect the highly competitive nature of the business. Market conditions are very dynamic and firms rapidly adjust their practices to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage. Handles difficult and complex audit assignments that usually are not fully precedent by previous similar efforts. Exercises considerable judgment in using the broad framework provided by the guidelines in adapting them to each assignment or in using them as a foundation for developing new audit methods. For example, the incumbent may be involved in an audit in the meat packing industry and discover indications of commercial bribery, and may have to immediately revise audit plan to coordinate with other involved State and/or Federal regulatory agencies that may become involved.

4. Complexity - The assignments entail the full cycle of complete financial and operational audits of the large and complex firms engaged in the various phases of livestock, meat, and poultry marketing whose operational nature brings them under jurisdiction of the Act. The essential purpose of the work is to determine if the audited firm is in compliance with the financial provisions of the Act. The assignments require development of new, or modification of existing, audit methodology.

Plans, coordinates, and conducts audits of financial practices, accounting systems, and functional operations where there are numerous unknown factors to be identified and analyzed. The operations and systems of firms audited are in a state of change as a result of changing market and economic conditions. Unconventional and sometimes haphazard financial documentation tends to cloud the exact nature of many transactions. The difficulty of the work is made greater because of the regulatory nature of the investigations.

5. Scope and Effect - The purpose of the work is to determine industry compliance with the financial protection and related provisions of the Act. Develops audit plans and methodology for application to a wide variety of audit assignments. One purpose of audit reports are used to bring Agency management's attention to newly emerging financial practices found to exist within the regulated

industries. The work is of critical importance in determining those instances in which the Agency will file formal complaints alleging violation of financial provisions of the Act and in determining the necessary evidence that the Agency needs to support such allegations. The effect is an efficient and effective regional audit program, with skilled and proficient auditors. Such a program will result in improved financial stability in the industry and reduced losses to producers due to the detection of such practices as: misuse or mishandling of custodial funds and trust assets; failure to comply with prompt payment provisions; and, operations by insolvent firms. An effective audit program also results in potential savings to the public by curtailment of such practices as commercial bribery, price fixing, weight manipulations, and other unlawful practices.

6. Personal Contacts - Personal contacts are with owners, officers, management officials, production personnel, and accountants of the audited firms, legal counsel, and other members of the trade, headquarters staff, federal, State and local government officials engaged in related regulatory activities, and U.S. Department of Justice attorneys.

7. Purpose of Contacts - The purpose of contacts is to explain Agency requirements concerning the adequacy of accounting controls and financial records and to arrange for access to all information, records, and individuals needed to conduct a complete audit. Presents findings to representatives of the firm in audit closeouts. Justifies conclusions and uses persuasion in gaining acceptance of critical findings and recommended corrective action, as officials are often reluctant to accept recommendations for changes in operating or accounting practices. Other contacts are for the purposes of assimilating evidence, presenting findings and other information, and coordinating and assisting in providing technical expertise in formal proceedings against firms charged with violations of the Act.

8. Physical Demands - The work is primarily sedentary. There is some carrying of equipment and walking over rough terrain at site visits.

9. Work Environment - Travel is required. The work is usually performed in an office setting with occasional exposure to uncomfortable conditions such as stockyards, dealer buying stations, meat packing plants, poultry processing plants, and feed mills.