



United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Marketing Service, Specialty Crops Program, Specialty Crops Inspection Division

TRAVEL CHARGE POLICY

The following guidance prescribes applicant charges for travel-related expenses by Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division employees for processed products inspections, including operational rations inspections, and for travel-related expenses by Federal and Federal/State terminal market and cooperative market inspection (TMI) offices when travel occurs within the area of coverage encompassed by a local TMI office.

This Travel Charge policy does not determine overtime entitlements, mileage, tolls, per diem, or other travel reimbursements paid to SCI employees. Pay entitlements and travel reimbursements to employees should be determined in accordance with SCI Division policies without consideration as to whether the expense has been charged to an applicant.

Inspection Assignments that Do Not Entail an Overnight Stay

Definitions:

Maximum Charge: The round-trip travel time charge* at the current “Hourly Inspection Rate” for the inspection service provided; premium pay (e.g., overtime, night differential, etc.) rates should be substituted as appropriate.

Minimum Charge: 1/2 (50%) of the round-trip travel time charge* at the current “Hourly Inspection Rate” for the inspection service provided; premium pay (e.g., overtime, night differential, etc.) rates should be substituted as appropriate.

- For single-stop assignments, the maximum charge will be assessed to the applicant**. Exceptions for non-standard inspection services may be appropriate in certain situations but must have the written approval of the Regional Branch Chief or Federal Program Manager or their designee.
- For multiple-stop assignments***, the travel time charge to be assessed each applicant will be established by each Officer-in-Charge or State supervisor. The travel time charge to be assessed each applicant cannot be higher than the maximum charge or lower than the minimum charge without written approval of the Regional Branch Chief or Federal Program Manager or their designee. Once established for each applicant, this travel time charge should be uniformly applied for every inspection that involves multiple-stop assignments.

- When more than one inspection is performed for a single applicant at the same location on the same trip, the applicant will only be assessed once; the travel costs should be allocated equally amongst all certificates.
- When inspections are performed for more than one applicant at the same location on the same trip, each applicant will be assessed a minimum charge.
- Travel overtime should be based on the type of inspection performed (i.e., lot or hourly-based as appropriate).

* Each Officer-in-Charge or State supervisor will establish, with their Regional Branch Chief's or Federal Program Manager's (or their designee's) concurrence, a travel time charge to be assessed each applicant (i.e., the round-trip commute time from the inspector's actual duty point/official duty station to the applicant). The travel times will be established in $\frac{1}{4}$ hour (15 minute) increments, rounded up to the nearest $\frac{1}{4}$ hour. However, the minimum round-trip travel time charge to an applicant is $\frac{1}{2}$ hour (30 minutes) when the inspector travels by POV or GOV; there is no minimum travel time charge when the market is at the same location as the inspection office.

** For Federal/State inspections, substitute shipper for applicant as appropriate.

*** The Agricultural Commodity Grader visits more than one applicant on the same day without returning to their actual duty point/official duty station between inspections.

Processed Products Inspection Assignments Associated with Year-Round or Seasonal Contracts

Travel time and travel expenses (e.g., mileage, tolls, lodging, per diem, etc.) are not charged to an applicant with a year-round or seasonal contract; seasonal is defined as four or more consecutive 40-hour weeks. For year-round and seasonal contracts, only the hours an SCI employee actually works on an assignment are charged to such an applicant. However, charging travel expenses to applicants when there is a year-round contract may be allowed on a case-by-case basis with Regional Branch Chief written approval (e.g., an applicant may, under certain circumstances, be willing to pay additional travel expenses involving a year-round contract that does not include an overnight stay).

To ensure cost recovery on seasonal contracts, applicants may be charged travel time and travel expenses on a case-by-case basis with approval from the Associate Director of Field Operations. On rare occasions, other expenses associated with seasonal contracts may also be reimbursed with approval from the Associate Director of Field Operations.

An applicant that requests additional inspection staff during heavy production times not covered by a year-round or seasonal contract can be billed any associated travel costs incurred by the additional staff.

Processed Products Inspection Assignments Not Involving Year-Round or Seasonal Contracts

For processed products inspection assignments that do not involve a year-round or seasonal contract, applicants are billed for travel time and the hours the SCI employee(s) worked on the assignment. Travel expenses at the inspection site (e.g., mileage, tolls, lodging, per diem, etc.) may be charged on a case-by-case basis with written approval from the Associate Director of Field Operations.

Processed Products and TMI Inspection Assignments that Necessitate Air Travel

For any inspection assignment that necessitates air travel via a common carrier, unless there is a year-round or seasonal contract, the applicant pays for all travel expenses (e.g., common carrier ticket, baggage fees, taxi, car rental, tolls, etc.).

- In addition, the actual time in travel status will be charged as follows:
 - Travel Time: Charge actual travel time from official duty station, last temporary duty point or residence, as appropriate, to the inspection service site rounded up to the nearest quarter hour at the hourly-based inspection rate.
 - Premium Time Travel: Travel performed outside of an employee's regularly scheduled work hours (i.e., overtime work or work performed on a holiday) rounded up to the nearest quarter hour at the appropriate premium time rate.

Example of Computing Common Carrier Travel Time and Premium Time Travel: Employee travels by common carrier for a total of 3 hours to and from site Y for a Quality and Condition inspection on a lot of tomatoes. The 1.5 hours of return travel are performed during an overtime period. As an example, only using an hourly inspection rate of \$100.00/hour and an hourly inspection overtime rate of \$150.00/hour* (again, example only), the total travel time charged in this example would be:

Total Travel Time: 3 hours x current hourly inspection rate (\$150 each way) = \$300.00
Overtime Travel (an additional charge): 1.5 hours x current hourly inspection overtime rate* = \$75.00 (\$225 less the \$150 already charged as travel time)
Total Travel Time Charged: \$375.00**

*The travel overtime should be based on the type of inspection performed (i.e., lot or hourly-based).

**This is in addition to all related travel expenses and the applicable inspection fee.

TMI Inspection Assignments Associated with a Contract

If the contract specifically addresses travel charges, the contract will be followed. If the contract does not address travel charges, this policy will be followed.

Other Significant Costs Incurred on TMI Inspection Assignments

Lot fees (carlot and less-than-carlot fees) are set to recover the cost of on-site TMI service time, supervision and certificate processing. In addition to the lot fees, other significant costs incurred in the performance of a TMI inspection will be charged directly to the applicant requesting the inspection service whenever practical.

Per Diem Charges to TMI Applicants

Applicants must be notified of any likely per diem charge before providing inspection service. Per diem charges will be determined as follows:

- Federal Employees

When an employee incurs per diem expenses while traveling within the area of coverage encompassed by a local terminal market inspection office, the appropriate U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) per diem rate will apply. Any related lodging charges, hotel taxes, parking fees, etc., will also be charged as appropriate.

- Federal-State Employees

When a Federal-State employee incurs per diem expenses when traveling within the area of coverage encompassed by a local terminal market inspection office, the appropriate State per diem rate will apply. Any related lodging charges, hotel taxes, parking fees, etc., will also be charged as appropriate.

Procedures for Charging Travel Expenses When Travel Occurs Outside the Area of Coverage Encompassed by a Local TMI Office

When an employee is assigned to perform work at a temporary duty station (e.g., performing a relief assignment in another terminal market office, etc.), en route travel expenses will not be charged to an applicant without written approval of the Regional Branch Chief or State Program Manager. Once the employee is at the temporary duty station, the above procedures that address charging travel expenses when travel occurs within the area of coverage encompassed by a local TMI Office will be followed.

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