**Source:** Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle (*1905)

There were the men in the pickle-rooms, for instance, where old Antanas had gotten his death; scarce a one of these that had not some spot of horror on his person. Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle-rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floorsmen, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them.

They would have no nails,—they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan. There were men who worked in the cooking-rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator-cars; a fearful kind of work, that began at four o’clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling-rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism; the time-limit that a man could work in the chilling-rooms was said to be five years.

There were the woolpluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle-men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned-meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood-poisoning. Some worked at the stampingmachines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself, and have a part of his hand chopped off. There were the “hoisters,” as they were called, whose task it was to press the lever which lifted the dead cattle off the floor. They ran along upon a rafter, peering down through the damp and the steam; and as old Durham’s architects had not built the killing-room for the convenience of the hoisters, at every few feet they would have to stoop under a beam, say four feet above the one they ran on; which got them into the habit of stooping, so that in a few years they would be walking like chimpanzees. Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer-men, and those who served in the cooking-rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor,—for the odor of a fertilizer-man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank-rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!

“There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white—it would be dosed with borax and glycerin, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them, they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage.”

**The Meat Inspection Act: The Power of the Pen**

The "beef trust" comprised a few large companies that controlled the Union Stockyards in Chicago. Upton Sinclair became a worker in the stockyards for the purpose of gathering information that he would later use in his book "The Jungle." Published in 1906, "The Jungle" exposed the unsanitary conditions under which impoverished workers labored in the packing plants. From the publicity generated by the book, pressure was brought on Congress to conduct investigations, the ultimate result of which was the Meat Inspection Act.

As a companion measure to the Pure Food and Drug Act, the Meat Inspection Act brought the following reforms to the processing of cattle, sheep, horses, swine and goats destined for human consumption:

* All animals were required to pass an inspection by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration prior to slaughter
* All carcasses were subject to a post-mortem inspection
* Cleanliness standards were established for slaughterhouses and processing plants.

The Beef Trust fought against passage of the Meat Inspection Act, but could not prevent its becoming law.

**Pure Food and Drug Act: A Muckraking Triumph**

The first Pure Food and Drug Act was passed in 1906. The purpose was to protect the public against contamination of food and from products identified as healthful without scientific support. The original Pure Food and Drug Act was amended in 1912, 1913, and 1923. A greater extension of its scope took place in 1933.

The muckrakers had successfully heightened public awareness of safety issues stemming from careless food preparation procedures and the increasing rate of drug addiction from patent medicines, both accidental and conscious. Scientific support came from Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, the Department of Agriculture`s chief chemist, who published his findings on the widespread use of harmful preservatives in the meat-packing industry. The experience of American soldiers with so-called “embalmed beef" during the Spanish-American War added motivation to the movement.

President Theodore Roosevelt began the process by ensuring the passage of the Meat Inspection Act of 1906, which was followed by the Pure Food and Drug Act, passed in 1906 to become effective at the start of 1907. It was to be applied to goods shipped in foreign or interstate commerce. The purpose was to prevent contamination or misbranding. Contamination was defined in various ways. Contamination would be the result of any poisonous color or flavor, or of any other ingredients harmful to human health. Food was contaminated if it contained filthy or decomposed animal matter, poisonous or deleterious ingredients, or anything that attempted to conceal inferior components.

Provisions included:

* Creation of the Food and Drug Administration, which was entrusted with the responsibility of testing all foods and drugs destined for human consumption
* The requirement for prescriptions from licensed physicians before a patient could purchase certain drugs
* The requirement of label warnings on habit-forming drugs.

The active involvement of Theodore Roosevelt, who was repulsed by slaughterhouse practices described in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, helped to successfully pass the law even though some big businesses supporters rejected the new regulations.