



Manufacturing Career Feature

Manufacturing Food and Helping Others Live Better Lives

Every time you go to the supermarket and pick up a package of food, from a bag of frozen peas to a gallon of milk, that food has been processed and packaged, and more than 90 percent of it has been manufactured in some way. This is a field with ready employment, but it is tightly regional. **Food manufacturing positions** cover the gamut from positions centered on dietary and food science to management and logistics positions to general labor.

Food manufacturing covers nearly every food product you would find in a super market from breakfast cereals to snack foods and each one has its requisite specialties. For example, the number of people needed to make sure that soda pop is manufactured and bottled correctly is enormous: food scientists who check on the coloring and flavorings and sweeteners, logistics personnel who make sure that the ingredients are added at just the right time, and others who make sure cases of product go out every day. Working in a plant is not that much different from working in any other industrial position.

Those are just a few examples. For people who enjoy working with their hands there are other options from baking positions (where, depending on where you are working, it can be like a factory job, or be more of an artisan craft position, requiring a lot of upper body strength) to working in a meat processing plant. Most bakers keep unusual hours. Often they go in to work at 4:00 or 5:00 a.m. to make sure that fresh-baked bread is ready for sale; this also applies to confectioners and cake manufacturers. For industrial baking processes (such as those used to make national brands of bread), the work runs around the clock and becomes shift work with union benefits.

Contrary to public perception, working in the food processing industry looks nothing at all like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Employees do normal shift work, and modern food processing plants have stringent sanitation and worker safety regulations. There is usually a two- to three-week mandatory course for anyone entering the food industry, and all employees who work on the factory floor wear hairnets and gloves to avoid contaminating the food.

Salaries in this field vary widely from about \$12 per hour to work on the floor at a commercial bakery to about \$18 per hour as a truck driver or logistics specialist, all the way to six figures for top-end management.

Much of the salary range is, as is typical, dependent upon your educational level. Most factory floor positions require a GED and experience, while the commercial driving positions require a commercial driver's license rated for the vehicle necessary.

It is not until you get into the food sciences positions that a college degree is strictly necessary. A food science position generally requires a bachelor's in chemistry and a master's in food science. Most of the training available is in major land grant university degree programs, like in mining and technical or agricultural and mining colleges. (Texas A&M is one such example.)

There are several subspecialties in food science, each with their own career path. Much like being a chemist, these result in long-term careers with high job security. (The food industry is, like the companies that make diapers and Kleenex, nearly recession-proof.)

Most people who work in food science positions work for **food manufacturing** businesses, where they are instrumental in the development of new food products. They are responsible for such different things as doing shelf life studies; monitoring sensory evaluation of the product for taste, color, texture, and odor with focus groups; and microbiological and chemical testing.

Food science is a challenging career; it requires constant education. It is multidisciplinary. An employee may work in a lab for a time, then do process engineering, and then run coordinated tests. Some specialties that show up often are food safety, food microbiology, preservation techniques, packaging engineering and design, and food engineering (the people who set up the processes by which food is manufactured for consumption).



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Other parts of food science that are applicable, and come from a different set of fields, include product development (which is creating new food products), sensory analysis (which requires study in neuropsychology), and food chemistry and nutrition (which studies how is food broken down and digested and its physiological effects on the consumer). All of these come from different angles but work closely together: someone who does sensory work will work closely with a physicist who rates viscosity and creaminess, for example.

Most of the positions in food science pay \$30,000 a year or more for starting salaries, and it is not unreasonable for them

to get to \$90,000 and higher for the head of a major food engineering and science research lab.

Whether you are looking for a general labor position or a position that has you working in a laboratory, working in the [food manufacturing](#) field can be lucrative and rewarding on a personal level, knowing that your work directly improves lives of others around the world.

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