

Careers for dietitians in the food industry

Janine Waller

Janine Waller has worked for 14 years as a dietitian, gaining vast clinical, food service and industry experience. In 2001 Janine began work in the food industry at Dairy Australia where she undertook the position of Dietitian – Health and Education. In 2005 she moved to National Foods, as the Nutrition Manager, and has spent the last six years combining nutritional excellence with project management, product development, nutrition policy and regulation, and nutrition education.

Interview

What does a dietitian do working in the food industry?

This can vary depending on your place of employment within the food industry. Our primary responsibility is to guide new product development and associated education and marketing to align with public health issues and food regulation. This way we help to ensure a balanced range of products are available to consumers and that their nutritional attributes are appropriately communicated. We work with a cross-functional group of people, including marketing, research and development, sales, risk and legal. Staying abreast of the public health, scientific and food regulatory environment is essential. Education forms a key part of our role, ensuring key stakeholders are aware of and understand the nutrition environment they operate in.

Where does a dietitian work in the food industry?

The majority of dietitians in the food industry are employed by large companies that manufacture either food, beverages and/or ingredients. Generically, the industry that manufactures food and grocery products that are sold in supermarkets and convenience stores is called 'Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)'. It is the large companies within the FMCG industries that may employ a team of nutritionists and dietitians. Examples include Nestle, Coca-Cola, National Foods and Fonterra. Other employment opportunities lie within industry bodies such as Dairy Australia, Meat and Livestock Australia or Go-Grains. Some of the food ingredient suppliers may also employ nutritionists and dietitians.

What experience and qualifications do you need to work in the food industry?

The required qualifications are either a bachelor degree in nutrition, and/or post-graduate qualifications in nutrition. Whilst experience in the food industry can be beneficial it is about transferring skills from your current employment whether research, project management, communication and education, into the food industry. A passion for food, health and communication is a must.

What are the highlights?

The ultimate highlight is purchasing a product from a supermarket shelf that you have been involved with developing. From working with a cross-functional team in the process, to the execution through consumer education, website development, and working with media and advertising agencies is a very rewarding experience. It's all about being able to touch, taste and see the results of yours and the teams input in real life in the shops!

Advice for students who are interested in working in the food industry?

Whilst the number of nutrition positions in the food industry can be limited, they appear on the rise due to the number of companies increasing the focus on health and well-being. Have a passion for food, nutrition and health and a desire to influence the food supply for the benefit of Australians. Undertaking volunteer work may be a path of entry until an opportunity in the food industry arises. Personally, the food industry is a great environment to work in, it is dynamic, challenging and exciting, and it provides a wealth of experience and opportunity.