

Careers for Nutritionists in Food Industry – Sensory Analysis

Dr Samuel Stephen

Dr Samuel Stephen heads up Sensory and Consumer Research function of Simplot Australia, home of Australia's favourite food brands. He has been with Simplot Australia for the past 7 years. Dr Stephen has a PhD in food science (sensory science). His previous experience includes Research Manager in a market research agency based in Sydney and General Manager in Quality (Sensory Science) in one of the largest alcoholic beverage companies in India. He has also worked in a Tea Research Institute for over 12 years in the areas of tea chemistry and technology relating to sensory quality. He has published 14 research papers in these areas. He is the chair of the External Advisory Board of Food Science and Nutrition, Deakin University.



Interview

What is involved in working in the sensory analysis area of the food industry?

In food industry, sensory analysis is primarily used in new product development (NPD) and product improvement. It is also used in competitor benchmarking, quality control and shelf-life testing. Sensory research can reveal how consumers like or dislike food products based on their perception of sensory attributes, such as, appearance, aroma, taste and texture. On the other hand, a trained sensory panel evaluates the products analytically in terms of defined sensory attributes and does not evaluate on hedonics (likes and dislikes).

Where does a food industry nutritionist/sensory analyst work?

The Sensory Analyst works mostly in the areas of new product development. In general, new product development is part of the research and development (R&D) or Innovation Division. The Sensory Analyst with nutrition background could relate well with sensory attributes of a product as affected by the change in nutritional profile. For example, what is the impact on the sensory profile, and how is the product liked or disliked by consumers in view of reduction in sodium.

What experience and qualifications do you need to work in the sensory analysis area of the food industry?

Tertiary qualification in Food Science/Technology, Applied Science or Food Science and Nutrition is required. Course work in the area of sensory analysis is highly desirable.

What are the highlights?

A good working knowledge of statistics is required. Sensory analysis and consumer research are heavily relied on good experimental design and statistical analysis. Hence, we expect the candidates to have good basic understanding of statistical analysis.

Advice for students who are interested in working in the sensory analysis area of the food industry?

If you have a passion to work in the area of sensory research, you will really enjoy it. I find it fascinating to understand why consumers like or dislike a particular product based on sensory delivery.