

Working in the Food Industry – the role of a Nutritionist – an interview with Ramon Hall

Q1. What does a Nutritionist do working in the Food Industry?

This will very much depend on the specific position, department and the type of business involved. There are a range of diverse roles for Nutritionists within the Food Industry ranging from regulatory roles to ensure nutritional claims and product labelling are appropriate to a role involving nutritional research, building nutritional evidence to support new product claims.

Roles a Food Industry Nutritionist may undertake:

- Formulating/reformulating foods to make them healthier (i.e. lower salt, higher fibre, higher protein)
- Supporting Product Development of new products and reformulations
- Assisting with the design of products for people with special medical needs
- Human and animal research: building scientific evidence to support nutrition claims for new products
- Regulatory compliance
- Involvement in industry committees to improve nutrition regulations
- Following scientific literature and marketing trends and advising the business on trends that could be feasibly supported by nutritional science
- Quality Assurance
- Advising food safety/toxicology
- Advising of allergens
- Project Management
- Generation and maintenance of intellectual property
- Nutrition labelling compliance with Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) and other local and international laws (depending on whether business is Australian based or involved with international trade)
- Nutrition strategy
- Nutrition policy (writing, lobbying and implementation)
- Nutritional education
- Advising on consumer trends
- Addressing consumer enquiries
- Preparing nutritional marketing material for in-house use or for public use
- Public speaking related to general nutrition and/or products

Q2. Where does a Nutritionist work in the Food Industry?

- Small Food Businesses – may need to multi-task and undertake other jobs beyond nutrition; such as food safety, product development and quality assurance covering areas like product labelling compliance and product claims.
- Medium Food Businesses: may be more specialised than with small enterprises.
- Large Food Business: very specialised (regulatory in a particular region, NPD for region, corporate for pa)
- Multi-national organisations: Very specialised (regulatory in a particular region, NPD for region)
- Own Nutritional Food Business
- Publication or presentation of human research
- Lobbying Government to change food standards (to develop novel nutritionally superior food)

Q3. What experience and qualifications do you need to work in the Food Industry as a Nutritionist?

Need to have a broad understanding of the food industry. May start out working in a different role that slowly integrates more and more nutritional tasks. Most food companies (medium+) have at least one nutritionist working there! 10-15 years ago many companies covered some of the nutritional tasks with Food Technologists, but over time companies have come to appreciate the value a trained and highly skilled nutritionist can bring to the business. Most companies are attempting to adopt a health and wellness positioning in the marketplace and nutritionists can assist businesses transform their products to better, healthier products.

- *Basic qualifications:* Graduate Diploma of Nutrition or Bachelor of Science (Food Science and Nutrition)....entry level jobs....assist a more senior nutritionist until competency is built.....may take a few years until working more independently.
- *Advanced qualifications:* Master of Human Nutrition; Master of Science; PhD: leads to research jobs or more senior roles, but may still have to undertake an internship before working independently.
- Need to join associations such as Nutrition Society of Australia (NSA) and Australian Institute of Food Science Technology (AIFST) or special interest groups (FING or Australian Institute of Food Science Technology Nutrition Group).
- Should register as ARNutr or RNutr with Nutrition Society of Australia (NSA)

Q4. What are the highlights of working in the Food Industry as a Nutritionist?

- Launch products that are nutritionally improved or with added health benefit
- Successful completion of clinical trials
- Collaboration with researchers or other food companies to create new innovative products or processes

- Working in a team environment (different professionals coming together) to produce a new product or innovation
- Recognition for valuable contribution to successful innovation
- Helping make the food supply healthier

Q5. What advice do you have for students who are interested in working in the Food Industry as a Nutritionist?

- Get experience in the food industry even if not in nutrition, before you graduate if possible. Send your resume to many people/companies.....don't be shy. Apply for internships. Don't expect to start out as the boss and to drive a Lamborghini....baby steps! Attend technical meetings to develop a good overview of the food industry and to understand all you can about the food matrix! It is never a simple process to make a particular food healthier without compromising on taste and safety. It may take a period of time to develop an intimate understanding of what factors can potentially be changed in foods.
- Network
- Join societies
- Study subjects that are most relevant to the Food Industry, not just the ones you are most interested in. Biochemistry, physiology, nutrition, food chemistry, product development, processing, microbiology, marketing, project management, business management, immunology and legal subjects.
- Find a mentor in the industry. They will be flattered and will be happy to provide advice and direction and may even assist you to find a part-time or full-time starting job.
- Apply for all relevant jobs, not just the perfect dream job!