



Food Technologist L3

Madalina Brutu, Vitacress Salads

Madalina has recently completed the Food Technologist Level 3 apprenticeship with CQM T&C. We caught up with her to gain some insight into how she found the programme, discuss her project and why the programme is worth considering from a learner perspective, but also for any Food and Drink Manufacturer looking at developing its key people.

Introduction

I am Madalina Brutu, I have recently been promoted Continuous Improvement and Training Supervisor following the completion of the Food Technologist Level 3 apprenticeship programme. I work for Vitacress Salads Limited, based on at their St Mary Bourne site in Andover, Hampshire.

Why did want to do the Food Tech programme?

At that point in time before the programme started, I was part of the Technical Department as Quality Auditor and it was directly beneficial for the role I was doing, giving me greater skills within my domain to become more competent and efficient. I was seeking to build my knowledge and experience across a variety of subjects such as Health & Safety, Continuous Improvement, Food Regulation, Food Safety etc.

How has this training benefited you?

I think the whole programme has been extremely beneficial as it isn't just about food technology. I had originally thought it would be mainly focussed on microbiology and technical lab work. I was pleasantly surprised to learn it was much broader, covering wider topics such as where HACCP started, if you were to set up a business what you would need to consider before serving food and drink to customers, food safety and regulations and of course continuous improvement.

I think continuous improvement was the most beneficial as my role changed part way through the programme to Process Improvement Co-ordinator, so it has helped me understand more of what I was and am doing even in my current role as CI and Training Supervisor.

What were your favourite modules?

My favourite modules were continuous improvement and food safety regulation. In particular, I really enjoyed being able to go away and start implementing the tools and techniques I learned such as Fish Bone Diagrams, Root Cause Analysis and Brainstorming sessions. These really helped me identify and carry out my project too.

What did you takeaway from the practical days?

For my cohort, the practical days have happened at Campden BRI and it was exciting to meet everyone face to face as it's so different to just seeing them online. For the practical days themselves I really enjoyed the taste sessions and sensory analysis, as I found this more interesting compared to microbiology, but also it was a good comparison to how we do things at Vitacress. You get to see different approaches and ways of working, so it's always good to share best practices, and network with like-minded people.



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Madalina, please tell us a bit about your project..

The main operation at our St Mary Bourne site is to bag salad. We have 10 baggers that bag salad at a constant rate, bags per minute (BPM), and this throughput is one of our KPI's along with reject bags per minute to measure quality/waste. The more throughput and less rejects, the greater the efficiency and naturally you would create more bags and use less produce and time.

One of the things that started my project was looking at the output from the different baggers and their cone configurations that disperse the produce. We have recently had several changes and refurbishment, so it hadn't been something that had been looked at closely, however, to understand supply and meet future customer demand as well as drive efficiency improvements, I set out work to gather some data to compare results of baggers and cone configurations.

I found that the same product being bagged on certain baggers and using one type of cone versus a different type of cone, provided very different results. For example, if the throughput gets better by 2% let's say for one product on certain baggers/cones, multiply that by the 29 SKUs/products we have, just a 2% difference can amount to a lot. **We are talking around 100,000 bags potentially a week - that's a significant saving in financial terms.** So, a real opportunity for the business not just as a scoping project for my apprenticeship.

So, this is where my project started from and then all these calculations, data capture and analysis, were all put together and discussed internally. There is now a future project that has been put forward currently as an A3 presentation, to invest in new equipment and process improvements, to realise the efficiency gains and savings in as a little as a few weeks.

Why do you think it is important for employers to invest in their people with training such as this?

I think many people can have a locked mindset and can be consumed by their current role and workload. When your daily job is so busy with the same tasks, it can be difficult to take the time to look at progression or development. So just from a time point of view to look at this is so important, as you start to think about where you want to go.

That said I do think one of the most important areas for employers to support their workers is time, time to look at development plans and training, but then making sure line managers are fully aware of what the training entails to ensure sufficient release time and support.

Support from mentors is also critical. Mentors are so important to helping apprentices overcome challenges and acting as a sounding board for any questions. Without this it would be very difficult to complete the programme and carry out assignments and projects effectively.



When an organisation invests in the time and effort to develop people, it shows commitment to people growth, empowerment and overall worker morale which helps create a positive and happy environment. It's a mutually benefiting relationship to get the most out of the training.

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How did you find the delivery and support from CQM?

It has been truly amazing, I can't speak highly enough of the support I have been given by CQM T&C and my development coach, Richard Everitt. The way Richard has delivered the course has been exceptional, he has been very understanding, he spoke 'my language' which helped me understand the topics much more clearly with real life examples.

My first language is not English, and the same is true for a few others on programme but he was very patient and made sure the materials were simple to understand with plenty of images. The course was very user friendly, and he even recorded sessions for people away on holiday so they wouldn't miss out. I really appreciated that and Richard's whole approach. He was always there when needed and provided brilliant feedback.

What advice would you give someone considering doing the Food Tech programme?

I think it's really important be open and honest about what you want to do, ask lots of questions, and understand that this course isn't just about the lab work or microbiology. If you want to understand more about technical, the reasoning behind the tasks you do, build your experience or perhaps like me discover a different path, this programme is brilliant. It's a great qualification to have on your CV, to help you progress in your career.

I believe it's really important you speak with your line manager to make sure you have time for the programme, as this will be during work time, and a training provider like CQM T&C can help with that. Finally, be sure to feedback any issues or inconvenience you may have during the programme, as it is really important for you to get the support you need to be successful.

Finally, what's next for you Madalina?

As part of my new continuous improvement role as CI & Training Supervisor, definitely a course in this direction! Ideally, I would like to go on to learn more about lean six sigma and CI, building up my skills and knowledge further, hopefully by gaining some lean six sigma belt accreditation too.

I will also be managing a new member of staff and delivering training internally as part of this new role, so I will also be looking at developing my communication, presentation and leadership skills. I hope to continue to build my skills and learning with CQM T&C.

Madalina was one of the first people to complete the Food Technologist Level 3 with CQM Training & Consultancy, and her excellent work has resulted in a well-deserved Merit, as she achieves both the Level 3 apprenticeship qualification and a Level 3 Diploma in Food Technology. Huge thank you to Madalina for taking part in this success story, and to Vitacress for supporting learners on programmes with us.



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