

## CASE STUDY

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### **More women urged to consider careers in food and drink**

More and more women are choosing careers in the food and drink manufacturing industry – and, in doing so, are discovering a wealth of exciting job opportunities with competitive salaries and plenty of scope for career development.

The traditionally male-dominated sector has suffered from a poor image over the years, with many believing it to be unglamorous, badly-paid – and no place for a woman.

Even now, just one in four managers in the food and drink industry are female, but one woman bucking the trend is Sheela Kennedy, who joined Kraft Foods in Oxfordshire six years ago. She's now keen that other women take advantage of the opportunities offered in food and drink manufacturing.

“I've noticed first-hand that there's a shortage of women working in the sector at the moment, and I think that needs to change,” she said. “Although my department is equally balanced, I've been in meetings where men far outweighed women, which can't be right. The industry offers opportunities for women with all sorts of skills, and the career and salary prospects are excellent.”

Sheela started working for Kraft – one of the world's largest food and beverage companies responsible for household names such as Kenco coffee and Terry's Chocolate Orange – as an inter-company co-ordinator, organising the shipping of goods to Kraft business units around the world. She now works as a production planner in soluble coffee packing, keeping track of the amount of coffee that Kraft expects to sell and making sure that the factory is producing the correct levels of stock to keep up with demand.

“My job requires a range of skills,” said Sheela, 31, who has a degree in marketing and psychology from DeMontfort University. “I need to be able to liaise with different departments – the sales and replenishment teams, for example – to find out how much stock they need for their customers, so good communication skills are essential. Then I have to work out the most efficient way of producing that stock, taking into account how many jars we need and what size, how many staff are required and how much time we have. For this, I need to be organised, good at problem-solving and able to think ahead. It’s challenging, but very fulfilling too.”

According to Improve, the food and drink sector skills council, there has never been a better time for women to consider joining the industry. Recent research suggests that unless a greater number of managers and supervisors are recruited by 2020, food and drink manufacturing is at risk from skills gaps that could threaten productivity. Jack Matthews, chief executive of Improve, explained: “The industry is changing, with increased automation and technological advancements leading to a greater requirement for skilled and managerial roles. Boosting the number of women managers, and redressing the current imbalance between the numbers of male and female managers, is a key priority.”

In order to help more women in food and drink reach managerial positions, a recent scheme offered women workers the opportunity to complete an introductory certificate in management from the Chartered Management Institute. Improve subsidised 90 per cent of the course costs after securing funding from the government’s national Women and Work initiative – a campaign designed to open up new career opportunities to women in sectors where they are under-represented. Sheela was one of more than 300 workers who completed the training.

“I found the course really useful, and I’m using the skills I learned every day,” said Sheela. “I’ve been given more responsibility as a result of doing the course and I recently led a team of eight people to maintain our Investor in People status. I hope this experience will open up even more opportunities for me within the business.

“There are certainly plenty of routes I could consider for the future, such as going into planning management, inventory planning or business development,” she added. “As Kraft is an international company, there may even be opportunities for me to work abroad.”

Sheela continued: “Food and drink manufacturing offers a wealth of opportunities for women, with varied job roles that are interesting, challenging and fulfilling. It’s a sector that’s often over-looked by women, but I would urge anyone to find out more about the options available to them.”

### **PRODUCTION PLANNER: THE FACTS**

**Salary range:** Starting at around £13,500 a year for beginners and going up to around £18,000 for more senior planners. In a large company, salaries for senior production planners can be around £24,000.

**Qualifications:** There are no set entry requirements. Some production planners may have started as production workers before being promoted. Direct entrants usually need a good standard of education (BTEC/SQA higher national certificate or diploma), with some employers requiring degrees in manufacturing, production engineering, technology, science or maths.

**Benefits:** There are often opportunities for promotion to management level, and there could be chances to travel, particularly if your company has overseas interests.

**Downsides:** The hours can be long, and some weekend or evening work may be necessary.

Kraft is one of the world’s largest food and beverage companies. Its UK head office is based in Cheltenham and it also has a manufacturing base in Banbury, Oxfordshire. Kraft’s products fall into the core categories of cheese and dairy, chocolate, coffee and biscuits with major brands including Kenco and Maxwell House coffee, Dairylea and Philadelphia cheeses, Terry’s Chocolate Orange, Toblerone and Cote d’Or chocolate, and Ritz and Oreo biscuits.

Ends

### **Note to editors**

Improve is one of 25 sector skills councils established by the government to take the lead in driving up skills in the workplace in order to promote higher productivity and stronger competitiveness for UK businesses in the global market. Funded primarily by the government, sector skills councils are also supported by employers in their sectors, whose needs they represent when stimulating change among the providers of education and skills. Sector skills councils work closely with employers to promote greater commitment to improving skills in their workforces, and with schools, colleges, universities, and private training organisations to improve the provision of basic skills training and to make vocational and occupational training more relevant to the modern commercial climate.

Issued on behalf of Improve, the food and drink sector skills council, [www.improveltd.co.uk](http://www.improveltd.co.uk), by Nexnet PR, Leeds, [www.nexnet.co.uk](http://www.nexnet.co.uk). For further information call Nexnet on 0113 247 0029 or email [katrina.gill@nexnet.co.uk](mailto:katrina.gill@nexnet.co.uk) or [paul.newham@nexnet.co.uk](mailto:paul.newham@nexnet.co.uk).