



Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative

3 Ways Food and Beverage Processors are Developing Skills Training & Mentorship



The skills gap and worker shortage for Ontario's food and beverage processing industry is serious.

Food Processing Skills Canada tells us that the national industry is short about 50,000 people or 16% of the overall workforce, and every vacancy costs a business approximately \$190 per day. Given there are, on average, six vacancies per business, the cost to an employer is significant at \$1,100 per day in lost production.

Employee skills training and a workplace culture of continuous learning have long been proven to support jobseeker recruitment and employee retention, and COVID-19 certainly emphasized it. Even prior to the pandemic, [LinkedIn's 2018 Workplace Learning Trends](#) reported that 94% of employees would stay longer in companies that are willing to invest in their professional development.

As part of the Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative (OACSI), three food and beverage processing companies had the opportunity to develop training and mentorship strategies to support their workforce in unique ways.

Creating a blended approach to employee upskilling

With over 700 full-time employees and an impressive growth plan, [Highbury Canco](#) recognized they needed a comprehensive approach to upskilling employees that was customized to their facility in Leamington, Ontario, otherwise known as the heart of Canada's tomato capital.

"We decided to use an [Alchemy Learning Management System and Playbook](#) for our online skills training to ensure a consistent approach for all levels of employees. We also implemented packer training and seamer training onsite for a blended approach of hands-on and online learning," said Brittany Gurney, Training Coordinator. "A survey we conducted confirmed that employees appreciate the training and use it daily in their jobs. Next we would like to add training in multiple languages and more video-based learning."

Adapting employee training & upskilling for the virtual world

For [Village Juicery](#), their new training strategy started with a 100% commitment to digital learning from paper-based. The Toronto maker of fresh, organic, plant-based beverages, meals, and cleanses has 90 full-time and 75 part-time employees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company knew it needed a new approach to training.

"We implemented a semi-custom system to provide training on policies and procedures, health and safety, and to make it easier for our employees to access a training library and onboarding tools," Tanu Kapoor, Director of Human Resources. "With this new system, managers can also spend more time on team building and operational efficiencies. We are always thinking about how we can improve the life journey of our employees and we are already seeing improvements in the quality of products."

Mentoring women & newcomers entering the food and beverage processing industry

For [Centennial Foods](#), recognizing an underrepresented demographic — women — in the food and beverage processing industry and providing mentorship was a priority. As an international distributor of fresh and frozen protein products, their workforce is also diverse with many new Canadians and landed immigrants employed.

“Providing leadership training and mentorship to women, and skills training to our workforce is how we intend to retain and support employees,” Atoosa Shahrooz, Centennial Food Group “For our company, mentorship is closely connected to the local community and is customized to our predominantly Asian, female workforce.”

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