

# Product Developer

*"That product is my handiwork and I take pride in watching people enjoy what I've made"*

## WHAT I LIKE BEST ABOUT THE CAREER

*"There is a big satisfaction in walking down a grocery aisle and seeing things that you've created."*

## THE WORKING WORLD

*"Find what you like to do, whether that takes you a long time or a short time, because if you don't like what you're doing, you're not going to be very successful at it. Life is too short to be doing something you don't like to do."*

## EMPLOYER

Saxby Foods Ltd.

## EDUCATION

Bachelor of Science in  
Food Science &  
Chemical Engineering

## YEARS IN WORKFORCE

5 years

## SALARY RANGE

\$30,000 - \$80,000

## CAREER PATH

Grocery Store Employee,  
Cheese Maker,  
Research & Development (Dairy),  
Quality Assurance Manager,  
Product Developer



•Mark•Farthing•

## WHAT IS A PRODUCT DEVELOPER?

Walk down any supermarket aisle and you are bombarded with a diversity of choices: a sometimes bewildering variety of style, taste, ingredients, serving sizes and methods of preparation. Each product is carefully designed and packaged to appeal to you in some way - to your senses, your pocketbook or even your conscience. The person who masterminds many of those decisions is a product developer, part of a team that analyzes market trends, identifies a need and develops products to meet those needs. If the product you're looking at happens to be a delicious cheesecake or English trifle, that person might be Mark Farthing at Saxby Foods Ltd.

## WHAT DOES A PRODUCT DEVELOPER DO?

Mark's job is to take a good idea and make it happen. Typically, someone involved with customer service or marketing comes to him with an idea for a new product. Since Saxby Foods makes desserts, that product might have a tempting title like Apple Cheesecake with Pecan Crumble, Turtle Cheesecake or Tiramisu. Mark starts with researching ingredients and suppliers and orders samples to use in the recipe.

**Testing and Tweaking** "The next stage is playing around in the kitchen," explains Mark "preparing some good samples for us to try out." The samples will undergo rigorous testing for flavour, appearance, texture, freeze-thaw stability and shelf life. While there are a range of scientific assessments



that can be done, Saxby's relies on direct feedback from its customers. With a factory outlet and cafeteria on site, they can try the products out with current or potential customers. Formal taste panels, where individuals conduct "blind" taste tests, might also be conducted by retail customers who will sell Saxby products.

**Size matters** Making hundreds of cakes rather than one cake isn't just a matter of multiplying ingredients. Water loss in the baking process, for example, changes when you are dealing in tons rather than kilograms. Mark has to take the lab results and transfer them onto an industrial scale, working carefully with the production manager to plan the process. "It's a team effort, all the way," explains Mark, "and that means going out there and listening to workers on the production line. We all put our heads together to plan the simplest, most efficient way to make this product."

## HOW TO BECOME A PRODUCT DEVELOPER

Product developers should have a bachelor's degree in food science, since their work is

often combined with lab analysis. Mark also has a degree in chemical engineering, which he finds immensely helpful in understanding the technical aspects of production. That background, for example, enabled Mark to modify a custard-making machine to produce cream cheese cakes, rather than having to purchase new equipment.

Who should consider this line of work? "People who are creative and persistent - who won't let mistakes or failures get them down, and who have the people skills to work with a team," says Mark.

## THE FUTURE

Mark sees the future of product development as going "nowhere but up". Customers are always demanding new and different products, encouraged by new technologies that make new products and processes possible. On a personal level, Mark is looking to being an entrepreneur himself one day, and views this work as part of preparing for that role. "I'm using every experience to learn," stresses Mark "as an investment for my future."

## RELATED CAREERS

### Quality Assurance (QA) Manager

*The QA manager oversees the operation of the lab and works closely with all staff to ensure the product is not only safe but consistent and high quality in nature.*

### Production Manager

*A production manager oversees the entire production of one or several products in a food processing plant, ensuring the product is prepared safely, efficiently and according to specifications.*



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 or visit the website at [www.afpa.com](http://www.afpa.com)