

Quality Assurance Manager

"As this company grows, so do I, with new challenges and responsibilities. It's an exciting place to be."

WHAT I LIKE BEST ABOUT THE CAREER

"You work with the entire process - from raw material and ingredients all the way to the final product. You get to see the whole picture, rather than just one piece of the puzzle."

THE WORKING WORLD

"Listen to yourself within and let that guide your choices. You get the most energy out of something if you are driven to do it."

EMPLOYER

FNA Foods Inc.



• Monique • Keultjes •

EDUCATION

*Bachelor of Science in Food Technology,
Master of Science in Food Process Engineering*

YEARS IN WORKFORCE

5 years

SALARY RANGE

\$45,000 - \$65,000

CAREER PATH

*Research Assistant,
Research & Development Technologist,
Research & Development/Quality Assurance Manager*

WHAT IS A QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER?

"A Quality Assurance (QA) Manager ensures the safety and quality of all processes and products within a production facility," explains Monique Keultjes at FNA Foods Inc.. FNA manufactures a natural binding system used to adhere pieces of fresh meat together. Using this method, meat, poultry, fish, seafood or a combination of the four can be bound and shaped into a desired form, ready for portioning, cooking or freezing. In establishing a total quality system, a QA manager defines a network of procedures and documentation for every step in the production process, from receipt of raw materials and ingredients to packaging and distribution. This commitment to assuring quality throughout the process is in contrast to accepted practice in the past, which relied heavily on end-product testing.

WHAT DOES A QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER DO?

Building a framework of quality systems and procedures is the first task of a quality assurance manager, but it doesn't stop there. "We are constantly verifying and validating these systems to ensure they are doing the job they are supposed to do," says Monique, who stresses the importance of a team effort in building and managing the system. Data analysis is a big part of the job, looking for patterns and trends in results from quality control tests. Like many jobs, there are always meetings to attend, budgets to track and new staff to train.

Trouble-shooting "I love trouble-shooting," says Monique, who spends about 20% of her time in the production area. "Everyone works together to find out where the bottleneck is or where the problem came from." While quality assurance managers have to quickly assess and respond to situations, they also



have to be proactive - anticipating ahead of time where a problem might occur. "We try to predict, for example, how a new piece of equipment might impact quality."

Plant Policing "I'm like a police officer, only I make some of the rules in this plant as well as enforce them," explains Monique. "I have an advisory role in production but a regulatory role in matters affecting product quality or safety. If I go into a plant and see food handling or equipment that may negatively affect quality or safety, I have the direct authority to stop production or do whatever is needed to correct the situation."

HOW TO BECOME A QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER

Quality assurance managers need strong interpersonal, communication and organizational skills. A broad base of knowledge in chemistry, microbiology and statistical analysis is important, as well as the ability to think creatively and find solutions, often under tight timelines and stressful conditions. "Problems always seem to come with more problems," observes Monique "you get them whether you are ready or not, and then you have to face them and find a way to solve them."

Education plus experience is required to do this job. A Bachelor's degree in food science or microbiology followed by experience in a lab environment is recommended. Production experience is a bonus, especially since many of your decisions will impact the jobs of production workers.

THE FUTURE

There is a growing demand for quality assurance personnel, driven by consumer and regulatory demands for safe and consistent quality products. An increasing number of corporate clients are refusing to do business with plants that do not have rigorous QA programs in place. Monique is confident that this trend will continue, stressing that "food safety will never disappear again - it will only become a bigger issue." As for the future, Monique considers herself fortunate to be working for a fast growing company that provides plenty of opportunities for personal and professional growth. "As this company grows, so do I, with new challenges and responsibilities. It's an exciting place to be."

RELATED CAREERS

Quality Control (QC) Manager

Quality control is the part of a quality assurance (QA) system concerned with testing both products and plant conditions. The quality control manager oversees and documents these procedures and organizes the lab, ensuring all chemicals and materials are in stock.

Depending on the size of the plant, a QC Manager may supervise a staff of technicians.

HACCP Coordinator

A HACCP or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point system is a multi-faceted system of procedures and programs designed to identify and eliminate or control potential food hazards. A HACCP coordinator is responsible for designing and implementing this system with the help of a cross-departmental team.

Research & Development Manager (R&D)

Research and development managers are found in most companies aiming to expand their product line and market share. R&D personnel work on developing and testing new products.

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For more info. check with Janet Henderson,
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or visit the website at www.afpa.com