

1. **Executive Summary**

Toronto is the third largest food processing sectors in North America. It employs more than 62,000 people in the greater Toronto region with sales of about $18 billion. Food and Beverage Manufacturing in Toronto has increased over the past decade even as other manufacturing industries have contracted. Employment and sales are up significantly.

The sector, however, has many human resource and workforce development challenges; in particular recruitment (including the use of temporary workers) and training (including health and safety). The sector as a whole has shifted from some larger firms to a far greater number of smaller firms. One factor in this is the growth of demand for artisanal foods and beverages. The lion’s share of employment growth has occurred in bakeries, meat, beverages, and specialized foods, which account for over eighty percent of enterprises and more than 50% percent of all employment.

While a significant policy concern in other industries, the Food and Beverage Manufacturing sector is not undergoing the kind of automation which will affect employment or hiring demand in the near future. The growth of smaller firms, coupled with technological changes in retail, strongly suggests that manufacturing is becoming increasingly linked to direct marketing and retail.

Based on a thorough analysis of the sector and through conversations with industry and key informants, a number of recommendations related to Toronto’s workforce development system are being put forward:

1. Raise awareness about the sector and its employment opportunities. Employers have challenges in recruiting workers. They cite lack of awareness about the sector as a contributing factor.
2. Increase employers’ awareness of sector-related education and training and existing community services. Employers may not be aware of these opportunities.
3. Prepare potential employees for the realities of the work environment. The realities of different work environments within the sector do not suit all job seekers. Some jobs have physical demands, many are repetitive and some environments require shift work. Employers point out that some workers will leave after just one day on the job because the demands of the job and the working conditions are different than what the new employees expect. Employers and screening agencies could provide a more complete and accurate picture of the workplace realities to increase the likelihood that those who are hired stay in the jobs. This is particularly true when it comes to meat manufacturing which often sees few workers return after one day on the job.
4. Better align education to industry needs. There appears to be a disconnect between what programs train for (culinary skills) and where the job are (processing). There are few programs in Toronto that focus on Food and Beverage Manufacturing, and even employment counsellors seem to equate this industry with hospitality employment.
5. Help bridge the gap between job seeker and successful employee. Employers interviewed for this research underscored the importance of employees having well-developed “soft skills” in order to be successful on the job. These include often-cited attributes such as punctuality, reliability and a positive attitude; but also include a flexible orientation to one’s work and a willingness to continue to learn on the job.
6. Establish a workforce intermediary role to aid in recruiting and screening job seekers and supporting new hires. A role could be established that works to connect qualified and willing job seekers with industry’s demand for workers. This role could help implement many of the recommendations identified here and provide a viable alternative to temp agencies. Activities assigned to this entity could include:
* Working closely with industry to understand employment requirements,
* Staying current on education, skills training and employment services available in the community,
* Communicating industry needs and opportunities to potential employees and intermediaries,
* Providing counselling support/job coaching to new hires to help them manage the transition from unemployment to employment,
1. Recognize and address systemic obstacles to improved recruitment and retention. Working conditions appear to be a significant contributor to recruitment challenges and poor employee retention. Production work can be physically demanding and repetitive, and working environments may include noise, temperature fluctuations and strong odours. These conditions, coupled with low wages, can make the work unattractive. Addressing systemic obstacles requires employer participation and optimally, the backing of industry associations.