

Food Scientist

Work out why food spoils, how to stop it, and what has to change before a new product reaches a shelf.

TYPICAL PAY

\$88,720

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$53k to \$145k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Food company laboratories, pilot plants, factories, government age...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 Chemistry and biology are the two that matter. Take math as far as your school offers it.
- 2 Bachelor's degree in food science** 4 years
 Four years of chemistry, microbiology, engineering and nutrition applied to food. If your state university has no food science department, a chemistry or microbiology degree also works.
- 3 Internship in a food company** Summers
 Summer placements at manufacturers are the standard route to a graduate job, and most departments run a placement office for exactly this.
- 4 First job** After graduation
 Product development, quality assurance, food safety or sensory science. You will spend the first year learning how a factory actually behaves.
- 5 Master's degree, optional** 2 years
 Often funded by a research assistantship or paid for by an employer. It is the usual step toward leading a development team.

Pros and cons

- + Strong hiring and a clear route into industry from a four-year degree
- + Graduate study is often funded rather than paid for
- + You can point at something in a supermarket and say you made that
- Factory trials mean early starts, night shifts and cold rooms
- Marketing will overrule your science sometimes
- Recalls and contamination scares are high pressure and public

Good to know

Universities run trained taste panels

Sensory evaluation is a laboratory discipline with its own booths, lighting rules and statistics. Cornell runs a dedicated sensory evaluation center, and companies pay for that kind of work because...

Shelf life is tested by cheating time

Nobody waits a year to learn if a product lasts a year. Samples are held in warm, humid cabinets that speed spoilage up in a predictable way, and the result is scaled back to real time.

Optional boosts

Food safety and regulatory affairs. Sensory science. Food engineering and process design. Packaging science.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Food Scientists and Technologists (19-1012.00)
 Institute of Food Technologists
 Cornell University, Department of Food Science
 Food and Drug Administration, Human Foods Program

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/food-scientist>



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