

# Career success stories from Scotland's food and drink industry



These case studies highlight the variety of rewarding career opportunities available across the Scottish food and drink industry.



*"My ultimate goal is to franchise my business throughout Scotland; maybe even the entire UK!"*

## Alexander Xavier Walker

Director of a small business

### Where did it all begin?

I started working at my local fish and chip shop when I was 14. At 18 years old, I went to Lancaster University and achieved a degree in Environmental Science. On my return, my boss at the time offered me an investment opportunity to open up my own fish and chip shop. I spent the next two years searching for the perfect site, before settling on Berryden in Aberdeen.

### What made you want to work within the food and drink industry?

During eight years at Lows Traditional Fish & Chips, I fell in love with the business. I was involved with many areas such as marketing and learnt a lot about how to run a business. This drove me to open up my own fish and chip shop.

### Do you have any qualifications that led you to this job?

I firmly believe that my degree has helped me in setting up my own business. Although it is not a business degree, it did teach me how to think critically and differently which has made a huge impact on the process.

### What do you enjoy most about your current role?

The best thing about the role is being my own boss. I enjoy being in control of everything, making decisions and seeing those decisions make a positive impact on my business.

## What do you think the perceptions of working in food and drink are?

I think the biggest perceptions of the industry are long hours, and arduous unskilled work; which are complete fallacies. I think the food and drink industry involves incredibly high skilled work, has flexible working hours, and is an enjoyable and rewarding place to grow your career.

## Is there anything that has surprised you working in this industry?

The biggest surprise I have found within the industry is the level of support between businesses and the community it creates.

## Do you see many opportunities for progression?

Definitely, I gradually worked my way up through every single position at Lows; and with hard work, I have ended up setting up my own business. So, in short, there is as much progression as an individual wishes to achieve.



## What is your ultimate goal?

My ultimate goal is to franchise my business throughout Scotland; maybe even the entire UK! I believe hard work, determination and passion will help me achieve this goal.

## Do you have any advice to offer people considering a career in the food and drink industry?

The best advice I can give anyone looking to enter the food and drink industry would be; don't believe fallacies about the industry and work hard and keep progressing. My door is always open to anyone looking for guidance.



*"I feel very proud when I see a product that we have developed, displayed on the shelves in supermarkets."*

## Carla Mackin

### New Product Development (NPD) Technologist

#### Where did it all begin?

I secured a summer internship at my current workplace as a Quality Technician. My potential and strong work ethic was recognised and I was offered a permanent position as an NPD Technologist.

#### What made you want to work within the food and drink industry?

I have a passion for food science and general health and wellbeing. I love keeping up-to-date with innovations, food trends and progression within the industry.

#### Do you have any qualifications that led you to this job?

I have a honours degree in Food Bioscience.

#### What do you enjoy most about your current role?

I love working with our suppliers and retailers to develop high-quality products that are valued by the consumer. I feel very proud when I see a product that myself, and the rest of the team have developed, displayed on the shelves in supermarkets, which are consumed and enjoyed by thousands of people.

## What do you find challenging in your current role?

One of the main challenges is developing food products which are both tasty and healthy and that the consumer enjoys. Obesity is a challenge we are trying to help tackle by developing healthier alternatives to the market.

## What kind of support was available to you in getting this job?

Glasgow Caledonian University was a fantastic help in aiding my career. The University invited guest speakers from the food industry to share their career journeys and provide advice and guidance.

## Is there anything that has surprised you working in this industry?

I was extremely surprised by the amount of time and work that goes into launching a new product. Suppliers and retailers work tirelessly to ensure customers are purchasing affordable high-quality products.



## Do you see many opportunities for progression?

Yes, the food Industry is massive with many different sectors and a variety of careers on offer. I 'd love to progress into a managerial role once I have built up my experience and help make a difference and my mark on the industry.

## What is your ultimate goal?

I would love to work in all sectors of the food industry and use my experience to help businesses. To achieve this I will work hard, learn from my experienced colleagues and take advantage of any opportunities that aid my progression.





*"It dawned on me that one way to make sure you enjoy your job is by doing what you love!"*

## Harriet Shaw

### Sales and Marketing Executive

#### Where did it all begin?

I went to university to study Linguistics and English Language, unsure of what I wanted to do after that. When speaking to the Career Counsellor in my final year it seemed that I had the relevant skills to go into marketing, and food and drink was the obvious choice for me. I managed to secure a one year placement at Mackie's at Taypack through ScotGrad. I have been lucky enough to complete a number of training courses during my time here including a diploma in Digital Marketing. I am now the Sales and Marketing Executive.

#### What made you want to work within the food and drink industry?

It dawned on me that one way to make sure you enjoy your job is by doing what you love – and there's not much I love more than food and drink! It seemed like the perfect fit and I now can't imagine working in any other industry.

#### What do you enjoy most about your current role?

I enjoy how varied my role is – working in a small team at Mackie's means that I am often involved in more than just marketing and get an insight into all aspects of the business.

## What do you find challenging in your current role?

I feel that there is more we could be doing if we had more time! However, we do the best we can with the time we have. I like to think that as a smaller sized commercial team we manage to punch above our weight in the snacking sector.

## What do you think the perceptions of working in food and drink are?

I think there was previously a misperception that to work in food and drink meant only being on the production side of things. I feel that as time goes on people are starting to realise the great opportunities there are in food and drink across a number of different roles and departments. It's a multifunctional sector where there are so many opportunities across vast areas such as sales, marketing, HR, finance, procurement and buying.

## Is there anything that has surprised you working in this industry?

I was pleasantly surprised with how open and supportive Scottish food and drink companies are with each other. It has been great to share experiences and expertise with fellow food and drink brands. We are all working towards the same goal of spreading the word about our great products to the rest of the world.



## Do you see many opportunities for progression?

Across the industry I see many opportunities for progression, whether that be into a more senior position or moving into roles that allow you to focus on areas of particular interest, such as event management, new product development or digital marketing.

## What is your ultimate goal?

I aim to work in the food and drink industry for the foreseeable future. I will continue to spread the word about the incredible opportunities there are for people looking to work in this sector or simply to enjoy the products and experiences it has to offer.



*"I didn't really want to go to university straight from school and an apprenticeship was a great option."*

## Jordan Fairlamb

### Supply Chain Apprentice

#### Where did it all begin?

I joined Dawnfresh in May 2018, after finishing school and have quickly gained a lot of responsibilities. My role primarily consists of production and inventory planning. This involves comparing orders and stock, then producing a plan to meet orders, and plans to rotate and use stock correctly.

#### What made you want to work within the food and drink industry?

I was interested in working at Dawnfresh as I completed my Advanced Higher Geography essay on farming, specifically aquaculture so I already had background knowledge. I have always had an interest in the supply chain process, including understanding how products make their way into shops. I thought the industry would be fast paced and varied, it's that and a lot more. Every day something new comes up and I have to adapt quickly to ensure the product is out on time and in full.

#### Why did you choose to enter the industry through an apprenticeship?

My school was supportive of apprenticeships, they made a lot of options available. I didn't really want to go to university straight from school, and an apprenticeship was a great option.

#### What do you enjoy most about your current role?

I like that I am trusted to do my job and have the autonomy to manage my day. I think the clear opportunities for training and advancement are exciting. I completed an SVQ Level 3 in Supply Chain Management and have started a Graduate Apprentice at Strathclyde University, studying Business Management.



## What do you think the perceptions of working in food and drink are?

I think the perceptions are generally that it is all based on the factory floor, and people are surprised when they learn that there are many other roles. I think if you have an entrepreneurial mindset and you're resilient food and drink is a great sector because it is constantly innovating, and looking for the next big trend.



## Is there anything that has surprised you working in this industry?

I was surprised by the amount of responsibilities I have been given in such a short time. I did not expect as many hygiene and technical rules involving entering and exiting the factory – which is a good thing as it ensures food and employee safety.

## Do you see many opportunities for progression?

I see a lot of opportunities for progression within Dawnfresh. I am particularly excited about my Graduate Apprenticeship and have discussed qualifications I could get post-degree.

## What is your ultimate goal?

I hope to develop my skillset and career within the food and drink industry and eventually move into a more senior position. I am taking the opportunity to learn from people in my team and organisation who have a lot of knowledge and experience.

## Do you have any advice to offer people considering a career in the food and drink industry?

I would encourage young people to seriously consider food and drink as a career option, no matter what discipline you hope to work in. Within Dawnfresh we have vets, scientists, food technologists and all business functions. We are a growing industry and vital to Scotland's economy.



*“My goal is to grow the butcher shop and I would like to have a restaurant to go along with it”*

## Stewart Mackie

Owner of butchery business and farm

### Where did it all begin?

I grew up on Blackfolds Farm which belonged to my grandfather and I now run it today. When I left school I completed a Butchery Apprenticeship at the local butchers and I now own S.A. Mackie Butchers.

### What made you want to work within the food and drink industry?

Growing up on the farm I was curious to see the next step in the food chain which is why I decided to become a butcher.

### What do you enjoy most about your current role?

Being my own boss is a plus, alongside that I enjoy progressing the business and seeing it grow. Interacting with customers and seeing them enjoy your products is also great to see.

### What do you find challenging in your current role?

Having your own business does not come without challenges. Firstly, there can be sleepless nights worrying you've missed something for that day and secondly the biggest challenge is staffing.

## What do you think the perceptions of working in food and drink are?

I personally think it's not seen as a viable career choice in many areas of the industry especially hospitality. Bar jobs or working in a kitchen are only considered as stop gaps.



## Do you see many opportunities for progression?

Yes, there are endless opportunities to progress in the food and drink industry.

## What is your ultimate goal?

Looking forward my goal is to grow the butcher shop and I would like to have a restaurant to go along with it. This will mean we produce all the way through the entire food chain! I will get there through hard work!



*"Knowing that I'm helping to do something as important as taking care of the countryside and feeding people is really rewarding."*

## Finlay Ross

### Tractorman and Assistant Manager

#### Where did it all begin?

I'm currently working as a Tractorman and Assistant Manager on a larger scale potato and arable farm based in Perthshire. I think my experience from previous jobs on similar farms helped me get this job, but a willingness to learn is the best attribute I have.

#### What made you want to work within the food and drink industry?

Initially I was really interested in working with all the machinery that modern farms have nowadays, but once I actually started, it grew into a passion for farming more generally.

#### Do you have any qualifications that led you to this job?

I completed a HND in Agriculture at college, this has been really helpful in showing potential employers that I have a good knowledge of the industry. But on a more practical note, having safety certificates for operating forklifts and sprayers has been a great help in proving that I actually have the skills and qualifications needed to do the job.

#### What do you enjoy most about your current role?

I think I'm lucky to work in farming as I can see the things that we grow travel all the way from farm to fork. It's pretty satisfying to produce a product from scratch and have it end up on supermarket shelves. Knowing that I'm helping to do something as important as taking care of the countryside and feeding people is really rewarding.

## What do you find challenging in your current role?

Farming isn't always straightforward and you sometimes need lots of different skills to get everything working properly. The main challenge I'd say is having to have a wide knowledge base from agronomy, mechanics, administration and machinery operation. Of course, none of these can be learnt overnight, so that's why it's always important to get the right training throughout your career.

## What kind of support was available to you in getting this job?

I would say the support I had was from the rest of the farming community and from my friends in farming. Everyone knows each other, so I was able to ask for advice on what was the best option for me.

## What do you think the perceptions of working in food and drink are?

The perception of agriculture isn't the best sometimes. We need to change that. It isn't just for strong people who can lift heavy things. It's a very complex industry and needs a wide range of people and skills to make it work. As a Lantra Industry Champion, I enjoy spreading the word to school pupils and other young people about our great industry and the variety of rewarding careers.

## Is there anything that has surprised you working in this industry?

I didn't expect there to be such a wide range of jobs within the agriculture industry that I've come across along the way. From other farmers, to mechanics, agronomists, salesmen, merchants and so on. There's no end of different things for people to do within Scottish agriculture.

## Do you see many opportunities for progression?

I really do see huge opportunities. We need more young people joining the industry as the average age of people is getting older. I can see great potential for jobs in agriculture now and in the future.

## What is your ultimate goal?

I've had a great career so far working in different places and in different positions. Ultimately, I would like to be a Farm Manager, but I'm open to any opportunities that might come along.

## How do you plan to get there?

Keeping on learning would be the biggest thing for me. It's important that you're able to take on more responsibility at work but then go on to deliver what you promised when you get that responsibility.