

Province commits nearly \$1 million to help job shortage in food and beverage processing sector

By Rob Paul

On Friday morning, the Ontario government announced it is investing almost \$1 million to prepare over 600 people across the province for careers in food and beverage processing.

This funding to Food and Beverage Ontario provides jobseekers with training, mentorship, and job placements with local employers in baking, food science, and food production and processing.

"Canada's food and beverage processing sector is a cornerstone of the Province," said Deepak Anand, MPP Mississauga-Malton. "It contributes billions to the economy, and, more importantly, it provides well-paying careers to workers across Ontario. Over the next 10 years, it's estimated that 20 per cent of the food and beverage processing are expected to retire. With each retirement there's another paycheck waiting to be collected. These hardworking men and women fuel our community, quite literally, and our commitment today is part of a new program launched by the government and specifically designed to support fresh ideas, training, and address to the labour shortage we face today."

Workers in food processing, transportation and warehousing, where job postings have nearly doubled over the past year, and a fifth of the workforce is preparing to retire, can earn upwards of \$25 an hour.

"It's a little-known fact among most people who don't work in food and beverage processing that it is one of the largest sectors in Ontario," said Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. "Together, these workers contribute well over \$14 billion to our provincial economy. Ontario's food and beverage workers have kept shelves stocked and our province running throughout the pandemic. Not only do you work in an essential industry, you work in a growing industry. Job postings in this sector nearly doubled between 2020 and 2021 going from 3,500 job openings to more than 6,000 today. I'm proud to support this exciting project, which is giving people a head-start in pursuing rewarding careers to help them land well-paying jobs with one of Ontario's 4,000 employers who have jobs to fill today and ensuring employers have access to the trained, highly-skilled workers they need to grow our economy and strengthen communities across the province."

Food and Beverage Ontario's (FBO) CareersNOW! program will help address this labour shortage by delivering free online training and coaching on topics such as workplace safety, employee-employer relations, and safe food handling, to prepare people for jobs in food and beverage manufacturing; a regional pilot program with the City of Brampton to assess challenges and opportunities in connecting local jobseekers with employers, focusing on underrepresented groups in the industry, including women and people of colour; a virtual career mentorship series delivered in partnership with Ontario colleges and universities that provides students with opportunities to connect with professionals in the industry and explore education and career pathways; and online job fairs to connect jobseekers with open positions.

"With this important investment, Food and Beverage Ontario has kickstarted a critical workforce development program for Ontario's food and beverage processors, and the participation by employers and jobseekers has been extraordinary," said Chris Conway, CEO of the Food and Beverage Ontario.

This initiative is part of Ontario's over \$200-million Skills Development Fund investment, designed to support fresh ideas for training and skills development that will help the economy recover and prosper.

"We know that Ontario's food and beverage processors have great jobs to offer, and we appreciate the role these processors play, every day, as an important link in Ontario's food supply chain," said Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. "Training our future workforce with the much-needed skills required and matching them with employers in need, will support the growth of our province's agri-food sector and maintain our confidence in our local food supply which all-told,

strengthens our province's economy as well.?

As part of the announcement, a recent participant in the CareersNOW! program, Anna Prea, shared her experiences.

?I recently completed my Masters of Engineering and Biological Engineering from the University of Guelph,? she said. ?Over the last few months, I started looking for job opportunities in the food industry and I realized that in addition to my formal education I would benefit from industry-specific skills training and that's when I learned about CareersNOW! I signed up for CareersNOW! job ready skills training program and have just graduated. Feeling great about it, I attended a CareersNOW! job fair earlier this week where I got the chance to interact with many talent acquisition leaders of various Ontario food and beverage processing companies. I would like to give my heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, Food and Beverage Ontario, and all partners of this great initiative.?