

Engaging a food science and technology consultant has benefits

Words by AIFST consultants special interest group



Food scientists and food technologists are those who study, research, innovate and improve food products and processes to ensure safety, quality and nutritional adequacy are maintained in food products for a vast range of consumer needs.

Food technology consultants are experienced food industry professionals who have augmented their technical expertise with business, project development and delivery skills. Some have national and international experience, together with senior level business experience as a senior manager, director or CEO.

Many are operating their own consultancy business and understand the nature and confidentiality of business dealings. They are critical thinkers who can review your wants, establish your needs and communicate clearly to provide insights into your food business based on the facts available.

Many larger food and agri-business companies employ their own food technologists with skills specific to their products and production systems. However, smaller enterprises and startup companies often can't justify this expense. Even large companies

can find it difficult to employ technologists with the full range of skills they require, as the need for those skills may be intermittent or changing. A better solution is to utilise the services of consultants who can be chosen for specific skills required for a defined period of time.

A food technologist can be quickly engaged to fill knowledge gaps in a growing and changing business, particularly if the task is not provided for in the current human resources budget. The services of a consultant can be very cost effective as the business is not paying for downtime, but only meeting the cost of an agreed task.

In addition, when special projects are identified that are outside the scope of current business capability, they can be used to fill knowledge gaps and help companies develop in-house technologies to meet future needs. With their mix of business, technical and industry expertise, skills and experience, consultants can appreciate the complexity of food systems and the implications around choices of ingredients, process, quality and food safety. They can not only deliver a solution more efficiently than in-house expertise, but can also assist business

growth and profitability.

Once you have decided that engaging a consultant is the best option, the first step is choosing the right consultant. The AIFST has a consultants register that might make a useful starting place. You should discuss your requirements, timeframes and budget with several consultants and enquire about relevant experience and references, understanding that confidentiality will be observed. It is also important to consider with whom you can relate and who could be the best fit for your business. Once you have chosen the appropriate consultant, you should move on to the important business of agreeing on the scope and price.

To get the best value from a consultant, both the company and the consultant need to be clear about the task, the specific standard of the output(s), and the time frame. Once the consultant has this information they can offer a proposal. It is a good idea for the company to be realistic about what can be achieved with the budget they have and, if necessary, work with the consultant to manage the scope of work to reflect this.

Often it is a good idea to stage a large project into a number of smaller affordable elements with a STOP/GO point at the end of each stage. In all cases, it is important to engage in frequent communication. This informs the consultant if they are on track and helps you provide timely information that might be essential to completing the work.

You can read more about Food Science and Technology at www.aifst.asn.au/what-is-food-science.

The AIFST consultants special interest group meets regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest to grow, learn and connect. 