

Neil Khandke



Neil Khandke is Group Technical Director at 2 Sisters Food Group (2sfg).

The company has sites in the UK and Europe and supplies chilled food to the retail sector. It also supplies poultry, meat, fish, bakery and frozen products to the retail, food service and food manufacturing sectors.

Neil's route into the food industry began in microbiology with Unilever.

What does your job involve? What are your responsibilities and how many people report to you?

I am responsible for Food Safety, Quality, Health & Safety, Environment and Sustainability. I have about 60 People in the central teams and functional responsibility for all technical, H&S (*health and safety*) and environment managers in the business.

Thinking back to school days, did you know what you wanted to become?

Not really, I wanted to be a Zoologist but was told it's hard to get a job so went to University to study Microbiology. I was going to study for a PhD but was offered a job in Unilever Research and took this and never looked back.

What were/are your main interests, e.g. science in general, food technology, microbiology, nutrition, something else?

I started in microbiology and in my early days worked in HACCP when it was just being developed and rolled this out in the business. I was also very interested in GMP and auditing systems. Later I became much more interested in Brand quality and consumer quality and how culture and behaviours in an organisation impact quality and safety.

What qualifications do you have? GCSEs? A Levels? Degree(s)/other?

I have 'A' levels in Physics, Chemistry and Biology and a Degree in Microbiology & Virology

In rough outline what was your job pathway - companies and job titles + anything of particular note, e.g. level of responsibility, exposure to any particular developments/issues?

In 1989 I joined Unilever and worked in Process hygiene microbiology (GMP – good manufacturing processes HACCP, Cleaning and auditing).

While with the company I then worked as Global Quality Assurance training manager, QA Manager in Unilever corporate quality team (*developing group procedures, GMP and audit management*), Global QA manager Unilever Ice Cream and Frozen Foods, QA, H&S and Environment Director European Ice Cream and Frozen Food and finally as QA Director Unilever Europe

From 2007 to 2010 I worked with Cadbury as QA, H&S, ENV director for Cadbury Britain and Ireland. Leaving there in 2010 to join Findus Group as Group Quality Director and in 2011 I came to 2 Sisters Food Group as Group Technical Director.

What were your aspirations when starting your career and what are they now?

I do not think I had any real aspirations at the start of my career other than to do well in any job I had. I was always very interested in food safety and quality and this remains my main interest area. I was lucky to start in a large multinational company which allowed me to experience many different roles in technical and also have significant global exposure so have travelled and worked in most overseas countries to enable me to see the cultural aspects and challenges in food safety and quality.

My aspirations now are to help my company be seen as leaders in technical, H&S and Environmental management and the current role is very interesting as it involves integrating 3 different companies with different cultures.

What single piece of advice you'd offer someone curious about working in the Sector?

The key to developing in technical is to experience different sectors and technologies. It's not about how many different training courses you have been on. Try to get experience in different sectors to gain a breadth of understanding. I have worked in technical or related functions all my career and will continue to do so. It is one of the few functions in any organisation which has an interface with almost every aspect of a business from procurement and supplier management, production, logistics, planning, marketing, development and customer and consumer relations. You have to be prepared to be challenged but it can be very rewarding.

What would you say to encourage them further? What is the best bit?

In my career I have visited most countries in the world and worked with teams in all these countries. The opportunities from travel and working with suppliers, customers and internal teams are very rewarding.