

James Cherry



James Cherry is Environmental Manager at Greencore. The company has a turnover in excess of £1bn and is a leading manufacturer of convenience foods, employing around 11,000 people at sites in the UK and US. One of its roles is to provide a range of chilled foods to major retail customers such as Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's and ASDA. The 42 year old began his food career in the dairy industry as an Environmental Coordinator.

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

Together with one direct report colleague I work across all the company's 16 UK sites supporting all elements of the business' environmental management. This comprises: waste and recycling, water conservation (*without compromising hygiene*), energy efficiency and carbon reduction, pollution prevention and legal compliance.

Broader sustainability issues are increasingly becoming a higher priority for the company and the sector as a whole, since 1994 I have seen a growth in the number of environmental roles.

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

At school my interests were science, food science and sports. I identified that there would be better job prospects in food and took A level maths, chemistry and biology followed by the Food Technology first degree at Reading University.

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

My degree's broad food and engineering bias gave a good grounding in a variety of subjects. As part of the sandwich course I worked for 6 months in the environmental department of Grand Metropolitan Foods Europe. This sparked my interest in environmental work within the food industry.

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

As well as the ones mentioned earlier I also took an MSc in Environmental Technology at Imperial College.

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?

My first job after the MSc was as Environmental Co-ordinator with a Devon based dairy factory (*Taw Valley Creamery, now owned by Arla*), I was there for 6 years during which time I moved to be Technical & Environmental Manager.

After Taw Valley I worked as a freelance environmental consultant for a while before joining British Bakeries (*Hovis*) as Group Environmental Manager.

And in 2005 I joined Greencore as Environmental Manager.

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

It was those 6 months with Grand Met that really got my interest in the subject and as environmental issues are constantly changing and expanding there is always something new to take on.

Over the last 15 years sustainability has moved up the agenda, with the demands/expectations of retailers (e.g. *one of the first being M&S Plan A*) setting the pace for sustainability in the supply chain.

There is still lots to do so my aspirations remain in the environmental area and within Greencore.

What single piece of advice would you offer someone curious about working in the sector?

We will always need food. The industry offers broad range of opportunities and there will be an increasing demand for environmental & sustainability specialists within the industry.

The chilled sector offers locally based long term job prospects - i.e. uses locally sourced fresh products/ingredients so production is unlikely to relocate overseas.

This is also important from a sustainability/carbon foot print perspective.

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

The diversity of opportunities. In Greencore I work with chilled, ambient and frozen food sites, on a range of environmental topics and projects. There's always something different to think about and there's the constant challenge of applying knowledge and experience to different areas.