

Dan Garland



Dan Garland is Head of Innovation at Hain Daniels. Dan's career path of has equipped him with the skills required to meet his new horizon scanning brief.

What does your current job involve? What are your responsibilities?

I work across all three divisions of Hain Daniels: chilled/frozen, grocery and fruit, and I'm tasked with innovating our operations to enable the company to grow. While no-one reports directly to me I do have to influence colleagues across many disciplines including new processing techniques and new products. I'm thinking further ahead than New Product Development. Innovation could be improving shelf life or developing new processes. We aim to not just follow the latest food trend, but lead it.

For example, current thinking looks at plant-based and insect-based protein as sustainable alternatives to traditional protein sources (i.e. meat). I'm considering the technical and production practicalities of this, including the engineering needed to produce food to scale.

The ultimate decisions on the company's direction will be made by colleagues in processing, marketing, technical and development. These will be based on my observations, so my role is as influencer and stakeholder manager. My previous experience (as Technical Manager) allows me to offer a practical perspective on what's possible.

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

I enjoyed, and was good at, science. So I took A level Biology, Chemistry and Maths.

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

After A levels the career options presented to me were stark: as a supermarket shelf stacker or go to university! I studied Chemistry at Reading University, enjoyed the lab work and got a 2:2. I could have gone on to a Masters but was keen to get into the workplace.

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

Even after university I was still uncertain about a career. After a series of temporary jobs, I took on a low-level laboratory role in a pharmaceutical company. This got my foot in the door. My next job, also in pharmaceuticals, saw me analysing the efficiency of equipment.

Tate & Lyle were looking for a graduate for its sugar refinery. I got the post and found myself in the food industry. My first project involved managing a new lab information system that integrated all areas of the business.

I also spent six months working in Israel and then became Technical Manager looking at making the factories more efficient.

After five enjoyable years with Tate & Lyle, I moved to Mars as Senior Technologist. I was responsible for running processes as consistently as possible to produce the same end result. We had a great support team and I built my organisational skills. I then moved into an engineering project manager role working on multi-million pound projects. This had great variety including product engineering, project management and stakeholder management.

A couple of years later a Technical Manager vacancy came up at Hain Daniels and I saw lots of opportunity to make things better there. Unfortunately, the site was closed which led me to successfully applying for the new Head of Innovation post.

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

When I started out I didn't really have any aspirations but I'm happy with the way my career is progressing. I enjoy what I do and, at some point, I'd like to go into production management. I've been on the engineering side, and the food safety and quality side. It's fascinating to see how these areas link up. I'm constantly learning – about people as well as processes. I enjoy enabling colleagues to come up with solutions to challenges. Communication is key, and time spent listening to colleagues on the ground is invaluable to the smooth running of the business.

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

If you want to follow a certain career path take a degree that includes industry experience. I thought my Chemistry degree would immediately get me a management role, but that has only come with industry experience.

Move around every 2-4 years, not necessarily between companies and not necessarily upwards. Keep your ideas fresh by giving yourself new challenges. Sometimes it's better to consolidate experience by taking posts on a similar level. My sideways moves really helped me to build my experience.

What would you say to encourage them further? i.e. what are the best bits?

I love working with tangibles – at Tate & Lyle there was a constant stream of sugar tankers leaving the site, it was chocolate at Mars, and now soup. I can see what I'm helping to produce. There is so much you don't even think about. From the high-end equipment that produces massive quantities of food to the people cutting up fruit ready for packing. Every day we work with extremely complex science, it's vital as we innovate and constantly change.

Be curious, be interested and be prepared to come up with new ideas. The industry thrives on innovation. Never settle for the status quo. Always think: 'How can I make things better?'