

Susan Barratt



Susan Barratt is CEO of IGD, a membership-based charity providing insight, training and best practice for the food industry. She was previously CEO of fresh food producer Natures Way Foods Ltd, but started her career in finance where her interest in how businesses work, and a passion for food, led her into the food industry.

What does your current role involve?

I work with diverse groups, namely food producers and customers (supermarkets), to support those supplying food, maintain and enhance relationships, and drive change that makes a tangible difference to society, businesses and the individual.

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

My path into the food industry came via my expertise in economics. At school I wasn't sure what career to follow but had an interest in, and aptitude for, maths and numbers. Originally from Devon, I was keen to move to London, and so an accountancy career seemed a good way to get there.

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

'A' levels in Maths, History and Economics and a degree in Economics.

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?

After graduating I joined major accountancy firm Coopers and Lybrand (now PwC) as an accountant. This gave me a chance to look at many businesses and understand how they work.

I found my interest lay in food. I love food and cooking and wanted to get involved in the industry, so joined Geest (now Bakkavör) as a financial auditor.

During my time with Geest I appreciated the fast-paced, responsive nature of the work and also enjoyed the international aspects. Whilst the company was large (giving me experience of the wider business), it comprised separate divisions and I was able to take on the responsibility of Divisional Finance roles in Costa Rica and the US.

After four years with Geest I moved to Whitbread as Divisional Finance Director and joined Natures Way Foods in 2005 in a financial role, being appointed the company's CEO in 2007. I subsequently became CEO of IGD in 2018.

Working with customers and suppliers is like being paid to go shopping! I enjoy studying market data and analysis to see what consumers want. This allows me to use my process-driven, number-loving mind and at the same time apply it to my other great interest – people.

The industry is undergoing rapid change and there's a wide range of opportunities on offer. With more graduates focussing on sustainability and environmental issues the sector has much to offer.

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

I have an enquiring mind and was always fascinated by how businesses work.

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

Give it a go. Be prepared to go sideways to go up. There are many opportunities for anyone with an enquiring mind and a willingness to work hard and be open to new ideas. For anyone wanting to experience this dynamic environment there are many opportunities.

What would you say to encourage someone into the industry? What's the best bit?

The chilled food sector is part of a non-stop 365 days per year industry. It has pace, energy and the 'instant gratification' of producing something tangible and relevant to everyone's lives. I work with major businesses and when attending seminars and meetings, I find the atmosphere addictive. The job and the industry are most definitely not dinner party conversation killers!