

Mehdi Adjiri



Mehdi Adjiri is Group Head of Technical Accounts at Compleat Food Group

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

I am responsible for managing the technical compliance relationship on behalf of all UK sites for Sainsbury's and Amazon. I do not have any direct reports as part of my role but have very close interactions with site teams across all functions i.e. technical, process, NPD, operations, supply chain and procurement. I ensure customer requirements are met from a safety, quality, legality, and authenticity point of view. I am involved in managing parts of the development cycles, working collaboratively with site teams to deliver compliance, and lead technical innovation projects.

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

I always had a great interest in biology, and it was always my favourite science subject. Both my parents are trained agronomists and university lecturers; therefore I was immersed in the field of science quite early on. Whilst I did not know exactly what I wanted to become, I always had a very strong belief that it would be in a field where biology would be a key topic.

Also thinking about school, did you have a particular teacher that inspired you to take the career path you've followed?

My high school biology teacher inspired me with her knowledge and the way she presented all the different aspects of life that are impacted by biology.

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

I started off with general biology and then as part of my first two years post baccalaureate (French A-levels equivalent) broadened it to being interested in science fields related to processes: e.g. thermodynamics, statistics, biochemistry.

My main interest is food microbiology; it is a fascinating topic that involves a wide spectrum of disciplines and knowledge to be able to be fully conversant with it. From biochemistry to genomics with a lot of statistics and data science involved, it really is a great area to train in and study.

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

I was awarded a baccalaureate with distinction, which is the equivalent of achieving B or above in all my subjects. I then graduated from ENSAIA (National Engineering School of Agronomy and Food Science) located in Nancy in Eastern France with an MSc in Food Safety and Control.

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?

My career has been split almost equally between food manufacturing and retail and I have worked from the bottom up occupying various positions in technical departments.

I started my career in 2006, joining the Bakkavor Technical Graduate Scheme, where I worked as a Quality Auditor and then Raw Materials Quality Auditor. After two years my graduate scheme was completed and I was signed off to move into my first full-time permanent role as Quality Manager at one of the Bakkavor sites in central London where I had the opportunity to have my first experience as a line manager. Following this, I joined Greencore as site technical manager, where I developed my skills in direct customer management and leading audits.

I continued that path when I moved to Charlie Bigham's, where I worked as a technical manager and group quality manager: both experiences enabled me to further develop my people skills and continue progressing with my customer-facing experience.

At this point, I shifted my career from manufacturing to retail. I joined Marks & Spencer in 2013, where I worked for almost nine years, across various chilled and ambient categories. That enabled me to learn about establishing relationships with suppliers, manage different partners and gain product and process knowledge across a wide range of products and factories. It also enabled me to get an in-depth knowledge of the NPD cycle and what the standard management process looks like.

After that experience, I decided I needed to go back to people management and manufacturing to fulfil my desire to continue my journey to a leadership role at director level. I did so by joining Graze, part of Unilever, as technical controller where I was in charge of all aspects of technical and quality compliance and the key point of contact with Unilever central teams.

An opportunity then arose with a senior role at the Compleat Food Group as a group head of technical accounts, that I successfully applied for. I started my new role in September 2023.

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

When I started my career, my aspirations were to become a technical manager, as I saw it as a key role in a food factory and had what I thought the most versatile responsibilities – a good balance between internal-facing and external-facing responsibilities. As I progressed in my career, I am now in a place where I want to achieve a senior leadership position where I can steer decisions and plans at a strategic level and where I can coach and mentor my teams and support their development and success. I also want to contribute to our industry through supporting students and graduates navigating choices of careers and how to gain experience.

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

Be curious, in the wider sense. Curious about meeting people from all areas of the industry. Curious about learning new knowledge and skills. Curious about where your career might take you. Explore all possibilities.

What would you say to encourage them further? ie: what are the best bits?

Food industry and retail are very varied and versatile sectors where there is a plethora of different career paths and roles to consider. It is an area where you continuously learn and with great opportunities to develop. Every day is truly different and as much as there is a routine like any other job, it really keeps you interested and stretches you.