

Let's educate and inspire YOUNG PEOPLE about how food is made

Written by:



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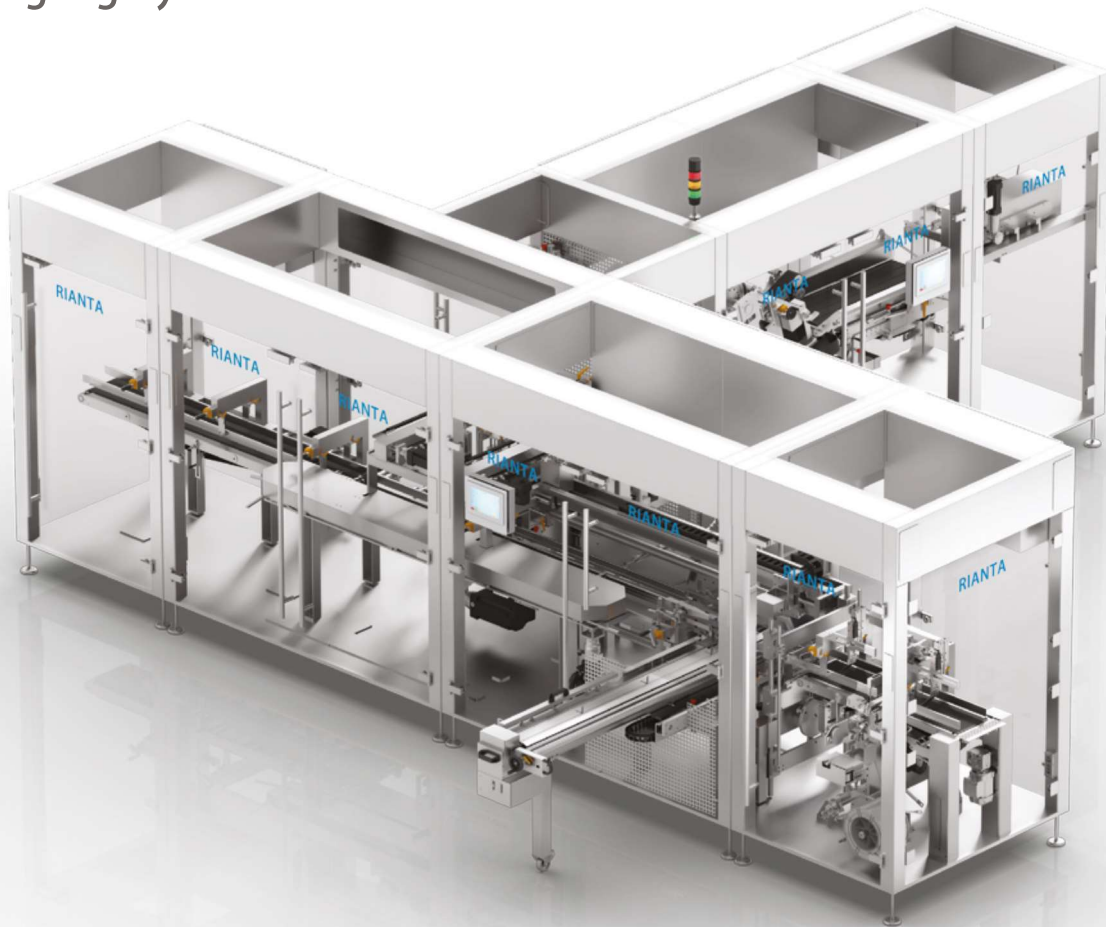
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Exploring the benefits of teaching children about the food supply chain, from food production to consumption.

The baking industry, like many others in the food sector, is experiencing challenges from supply chain issues and rising costs, to labour shortages. Whilst short term measures are

practical, in the long term, engaging more young people to start careers in the baking industry would better protect the future of large-scale baking. Therefore, it is important that





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future generations feel inspired by a sector that is an exciting place to work and that offers a rewarding variety of technical skills and creativity.

However, before we start teaching the specifics of the baking industry, a basic understanding of the food supply chain should be explored.

“We need to inspire the next generation to start thinking big about solutions faced by the complex network of people and processes that produce and deliver our food.”

The need to know about the food supply chain

Today, many of those at school are not aware how food is produced or prepared. Even as adults, many of us are unaware of the complex processes that food products go through before they reach the supermarket shelves. As a result and in order to secure new talent in the future, an effort should be made now, to educate potential career starters about the challenges our food supply chain is facing and how food reaches our plates.

A good starting place is to consider how food is produced, including



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over the long term, we need to inspire the next generation to start thinking big about solutions faced by the complex network of people and processes that produce and deliver our food.

Those people outside of the food industry are unlikely to have an awareness of the multiple stages food has to go through before it reaches our plates. Whilst some foods can be grown locally without the need for processing, most of our food requires greater attention. Mass production methods ensure availability whilst processing techniques ensure the delivery of high quality foods, both crucial to our modern lifestyle. In particular, they allow us to access products all year round whilst also extending the shelf life of many foods.

In the industrial baking sector, one interesting area that is continually advancing in terms of its capability is that of equipment and machinery. New industrial mixers, automatic baking lines and precision technology that enable the production of a consistently high quality baked goods are continually entering the market. By involving young people in discussions about the future of food production technology it is possible for bakers of the future to be inspired by the value of food and its journey through the supply chain.

Why cooking with children is important

Whilst learning about food production is important to allow future generations to consider the challenges of tomorrow, today, it is perhaps even more important that young people develop into healthy adults by learning basic cooking skills. One fifth of parents admit they “rarely” cook with their children. Yet, when children are allowed into the kitchen, four in ten enjoy baking cakes or bread.¹ It is understandable that parents often cook for their children rather than with them, because it is quicker and easier to prepare food themselves. However we need to encourage young people to make positive and informed choices about their eating habits, so they can live healthier lives.

Much underestimated are the many psychological benefits of cooking and baking to relieve stress and inspire creativity e.g. the much reported surge in baking during lockdown. Baking not only involves using practical skills such as how to weigh ingredients, but also allows young bakers to use their imagination and creative flair, for example, by decorating baked goods.

Another important benefit of food education is the valuable opportunity it provides to talk about healthy eating. It is recommended that

growing, harvesting crops and keeping livestock. By being involved in discussing these links in the chain, young minds can start considering the time, energy and money that goes into food production, with the aspirations of delivering more efficient practices in the future.

This would naturally lead to consideration of the issues surrounding the processing and packaging stages of our food supply chain, such as pasteurisation, refrigeration and fermentation as well as the necessary logistical elements, such as how food is distributed to retailers. For a healthy bakery industry

“Nearly a fifth of primary school children think that cheese can be one of their five a day.”

children are encouraged to eat a healthy balanced diet from a young age, so that they adopt healthy eating patterns to take into adulthood. However, many children do not know what constitutes a healthy diet. For example, according to the British Nutrition Foundation, 24 percent of primary schoolchildren (aged 7-11 years) and 17 percent of older children (11-16 years) think that chicken counts towards their five a day, while nearly a fifth of primary school children think that cheese can be one of their five a day.²

This suggests that children need more opportunities to learn about healthy diets and preparing food at home is a good way to encourage this type of discussion.

Inspiring children to work in food production

By educating the next generation about food, we can also engage them with the benefits and opportunities of working in our food industry. This is becoming increasingly important as many parts of the industry are experiencing a shortage of labour.

Not only that, but our food system is facing many challenges including the need to produce food sustainably for our growing population. However, there are challenges to face when it comes to encouraging children to take up a career in the food industry as it is perceived as a low skilled and low paid sector. This is not the case, as more people are needed in technical and highly skilled roles to help solve our food system challenges. Consequently, children

should be involved in considering the different opportunities our food industry has to offer, including jobs related to science, innovation and technology. An example of this is EIT Food’s “Day in the Life” series which profiles different agrifood careers. The series helps young people to learn about a variety of jobs from mechanical engineering to quality control.

By exposing them to different careers, they can understand how we need many people with diverse skills to produce our food and be inspired to work in an industry that serves every person on the planet.

A real-life example of food careers education for children

To inspire young people to get into baking, we profiled Alexandra Vaughan, a baker and small business owner at The Crow’s Rest Bakehouse, an award-winning micro-bakery based in the UK. To set up her business, Alexandra converted her downstairs living space into a fully functional bakery. She bakes sourdough bread twice a week for customers who order online and she also produces bread for local restaurants and cafes in her community.

When she is not baking for her customers, Alexandra teaches others how to bake artisan bread from her own kitchen. She enjoys sharing her passion and expertise with others and baking classes are a great way to learn a new skill, whilst meeting other people in the community.



Alexandra Vaughan, a baker and small business owner at The Crow’s Rest Bakehouse

Alexandra notes that: *“The great thing about bread is that you don’t need to be any age to do it. I think an important thing to remember when you are making bread is that every mistake is a lesson, so don’t be afraid of something going wrong. That’s how you will learn the most.”*

Alexandra’s job has been profiled as part of EIT Food’s “Day in the Life” video series, to inspire children to bake and even to set up a business in the future.

Inspiring children to learn about baking in and out of the classroom

The EIT Food Educators programme is inspiring children to learn about healthy and sustainable food production and consumption. Resources have been created for teachers to use in the classroom, including lesson plans.


In relation to cooking and baking, there are lessons on topics such as the role of yeast fermentation in baking and how to create and market plant-based milks. The programme is also partnering with food businesses across Europe to host school visits, to enable children to learn about food production and related careers.

To encourage tomorrow’s bakers to start their career in the baking industry, we are looking for businesses to partner by inviting schools to a workplace visit.

This would help children to learn about industrial baking and the technology and equipment required to produce foods on a large scale, whilst businesses can be part of the solution to attract people to work in the industry.

Let’s work together to help engage young people with food

Children are the future leaders of our food industry, so it naturally follows that we have a responsibility to educate them about how food is produced, as well as how to prepare and eat healthy meals.

We can also teach children about the challenges our food system is facing and encourage them to be part of the solution by working in our food industry when they are older. It does not have to be an individual’s responsibility to educate our children, rather it’s our collective responsibility to work together to support the growth and development of tomorrow’s leaders. 

About the author

Laura Elphick is an Ecosystem Manager for EIT Food and part of the EIT Food Educators programme, that aims to promote healthy and sustainable food choices among young people and encourage them to be the agents of change that our food system needs.

EIT Food is the world’s largest and most dynamic food innovation community. Supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union, we invest in projects, organisations and individuals that share our goals and vision for a healthy and sustainable food system.

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