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Pay and Benefits
 Training and Development
 Career Development
 Working Conditions
 Company Culture



Facts and Figures

Total Staff: 450 permanent, 150 temporary
Locations: Selsey, West Sussex
Sector: Food manufacturing
Annual Turnover: £82m

Biggest Plus

A growing business, presenting great opportunities to learn and grow with it

Greatest Challenge

Listening to customers and consumers during these difficult times, and focusing on the long term rather than just today

Summary

Natures Way Foods prepares and packs fresh food, principally quality salads and fruit, for the retail market. Its impressive list of clients includes Tesco, Morrisons, McDonald's, Pret-A-Manger, Pizza Express, Ask, and Zizzi. Established in 1994 and privately owned by the Langmead Group, Natures Way Foods employees 440 permanent staff at its head office and two factory sites in Selsey, south of Chichester, and up to 150 agency workers on a daily basis. Natures Way Foods has grown very quickly, posting double-digit growth annually. Turnover in the 2009 financial year reached £82m.



About the Organisation

Bagged salads are the bulk of Natures Way Foods' (NWF) business, compared to fruit products, and for both there's a heavy reliance on fresh ingredients. NWF sources all of its salad leaves from the UK and northern Europe in the summer, and switches to Spain for its supply in the winter.

It prides itself on its long-term commitments with growers. "What does make us almost unique is that we aim to get the food ingredients from harvest into bag in just four hours," says Richard Parr, head of operations.

The company was started by two brothers, Robert and David Langmead, in 1994. As it has grown, NWF has remained highly entrepreneurial and innovative, bringing fresh quality products to the market. Its strategy today is still focused on growth, broadening the customer base, introducing new products, and increasing market share.

Company Culture

"Our culture and values have served Natures Way Foods well through the recession," says CEO Susan Barratt. "Our focus on always delighting our customers, being a brilliant place to work, and getting better every day have

created, and continue to create, opportunities for growth."

NWF prepares fresh produce with a short shelf life and deals with demanding food retailers. That drives the energy and pace of the business, requiring commitment and fast decision making. "It means that our culture is about energy, enthusiasm, and a passion to get the job done," says Clare Roberts, HR director.

"Because timelines are so tight, management shows strong leadership, and there's a lot of teamwork, openness and communication."

There's also a side that's about enjoyment. "When we recruit we look for people who are characters, enjoy working hard, but also like to have fun," says Roberts. This is fairly evident from the professional yet friendly greeting in reception that visitors often comment upon.

There's a strong sense of family and employees socialise together outside work. Many people have grown up with the business and 25% live in the village of Selsey, making the company very much part of the community.

There's a huge emphasis on the relationship with the customer and this heavily influences the culture. NWF actively encourages customer



visits at all staff levels - not just sales. NWF really does want to 'wow' its customers on service, quality, delivery and price. It was once short of a particular raw material in Europe for a customer and so jetted the ingredients in from the US at great cost to itself.

Part-time working, working from home (for certain roles) and a thoughtful factory shift system are designed to be as family friendly and flexible as possible to accommodate work-life balance issues.

Innovation and Creativity

When Natures Way Foods innovates, everyone is involved. "There's a lot of shop floor engagement and healthy debate. Opinions here

are valued from top to bottom," says Parr.

"We often develop our capital expenditure projects inversely," explains Parr. "We've got the operators to help the engineers design the installations, rather than vice versa." The shop floor voice has influenced many high-value projects, including automated fruit slicing and dicing, optical sorting, and a £4m additional processing capacity project. Operators and engineers often fly to Spain or Holland for pre-inspections of machinery before it is despatched, getting important buy-in before it's installed on site.

NWF has done a lot of value stream mapping to identify where it can improve its process efficiency or add value. It hasn't been



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afraid to rip out whole conveyors, compress sorting processes or install leading-edge refrigeration plant to keep the produce as fresh as possible.

NWF has invested in state-of-the-art optical sorting technology to reduce 'foreign bodies', which include stones, wood chips and insects, and represents the largest customer complaint issue in the food industry. After all, the last thing you want when you bite into a Pret-A-Manger sandwich is to bite into a caterpillar. The company's latest optical sorters scan and remove so effectively that they have reduced foreign bodies by 80%.

Pay and Benefits

The HR team benchmarks all salaries and benefits through an external agency, nationally and in the South East. "We want to be an employer of choice to attract and retain key people," says Roberts, "so we ensure that our overall benefits package including salary is always attractive - which means upper quartile." Benchmark data is reviewed by the board so that the company can judge its competitiveness and what it needs to adjust.

There's a bonus scheme for which everyone is eligible. It's a 'one bonus' concept, driven by the company's financial performance, meaning reaching profit targets, and reflects the need for teamwork in producing results.

Pay is reviewed annually but may also be reviewed if someone moves into a new role, gets promoted, or assumes significant additional responsibilities in the same role. Managers can also recognise employees with *ad hoc* rewards for outstanding *ad hoc* performance, which might mean a financial payment, a gift, sports ticket or a slap-up dinner with their partner. For example, the engineering team had gone through a tough two-week period implementing new processes, and were given an expenses-paid day out at Goodwood races.

Other benefits include a contributory pension, 25 days' annual holiday, and life insurance. There are lots of sports and social activities, team nights out, and the legendary Christmas party.

The fabulous location and environment is a rich benefit in itself. Due south of Chichester on the West Sussex coast, the office and factories are set in attractive countryside and just two minutes from the beach.

Career Development

NWF operates a graduate training scheme, bringing in fresh talent and developing them throughout their career. Graduates spend two years in a series of secondments or placements in different parts of the business. Sometimes people will come into a specific function and move within one area of the business - for

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"Every day here is different"

"I joined as a branch administrator from a recruitment background with little specific HR experience, but after I became exposed to various HR practices in a role that was varied and interacted with lots of other departments, I quickly realised it was what I wanted to do.

"Natures Way Foods offered me the chance of doing the professional Certificate of Personnel Development diploma, and supported me financially and with study release.

"Every day here is different. It's very relaxed and friendly even though it's fast paced. We work hard but there's always the fun element as well."

Pippa Hoare, HR adviser, joined in September 2005



NWF looks for people who work hard but also like to have fun

example, supply chain.

Employees have one-to-one meetings with their line managers. The annual appraisal is more formal and fully documented, reviewing objectives, personal performance and constructing a personal development plan for the year ahead.

NWF has a strong further education support programme, giving financial support and study leave for professional qualifications such as the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Trained mentors are assigned to individuals when appropriate.

The management development course consists of an 18-month modular programme, run internally but using external training consultants. The programme covers the entire management toolkit, including managing a team, motivation, diversity, legislation, and health and safety.

NWF also has a team of trainers dedicated to factory personnel to arm them with the skills needed to operate the factory processes.

A growing business, committed to continuous improvement and encouraging its people to acquire new skills, is a real recipe for rapid career development. "As the company grows people can grow with it," says Roberts.

"For example, one individual who joined seven years ago as a buyer became a board member just six years later."

Corporate Social Responsibility

"We were a big, faceless green factory in the middle of a beautiful environment, bringing tractors and workers into the area, so we needed an active community plan," says Sarah Baldock, head of marketing. "It's important that we put a face to Natures Way Foods and get the spirit of our people out into the community."

NWF prefers to consult communities at grass roots level and get its people involved. Employees use their expertise in science and nutrition to engage with local schools and other groups. The 'Field to Fork' campaign has developed very strong relationships with local schools, with schoolchildren visiting the facility for educational field tours or sessions in the kitchen with NWF's food concept technologist, or practical tours and talks to go with theory in GCSE subjects.

NWF sponsors the increasingly famous Chichester Triathlon and regularly sends volunteers to help with community projects, with an emphasis on local heritage groups; NWF employees have helped with water vole conservation, sea defences and ditch clearance!

The company has an employee 'Healthy

Heart' charity, with various initiatives around healthy eating, exercise, and no smoking, including free cholesterol tests and nutritionalist consultations on site.

"While the company's product volumes have risen by 23%, our water usage has actually fallen by 14%, of which 98% is recycled into field irrigation water in the summer," says Parr. Waste to landfill has fallen 50% year-on-year and the

objective is to reduce it to nothing. "Our vision is to make waste as small as possible, but also generate revenue streams," says Parr. The majority of cardboard and plastic is recycled, and green waste goes to compost.

NWF has a very diverse workforce – about 40% is non-UK – and employees range from 19- to 74-year-olds. "Everyone brings something, and a degree of balance, to the team," says Roberts.



"I've moved faster than I ever thought I would"

"I joined on a two-week placement after university and have never looked back since. My bosses thought I should join the graduate scheme, so I did, working predominantly in the supply chain. I said that I really wanted to move into purchasing – there's lots of negotiating over money, which as a student I could relate to. So I joined the purchasing team as a packaging buyer, had different roles over the next couple of years, and have just been promoted to purchasing manager!"

"I've moved faster than I ever thought I would, into a senior position. I love the role I am doing for the company and get a buzz every day coming into work."

Richard Attfield, purchasing manager
Joined in June 2003

