

Ellie M. Watts

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EXPERIENCED R&D & QUALITY LEADER IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Passionate about innovation, committed to quality, and adept at leading successful teams. Expertise spans sensory evaluation, cost savings, functional ingredients, quality assurance, and operational continuous improvement initiatives across diverse food product categories.

EXPERIENCE

DIRECTOR, R&D / CONAGRA BRANDS AUG 2019 – MAR 2024

Oversaw a dynamic product development team comprising 22 Food Scientists, with 5 in direct leadership, steering thermally processed product lines that generated \$4 billion in net sales. Championed strategic leadership team presentations to ensure alignment, managed the operating budget, drove enhancement of product specifications. Cultivated key external contractor partnerships and led DE&I trainings and company culture initiatives across R&D. Drove project prioritization through stage gate processes from concept to commercialization.

SR. FOOD SCIENTIST / CONAGRA FOODS MAR 2012 – FEB 2016

Developed national and private branded pretzels, snack mixes, pita chips, puffed snacks, and confectionary products. Managing 2 direct reports, I carried out all development needs, executed plant trials, wrote finished goods and raw material specifications, and collaborated with finance, QA, Operations, Brand team and sales to commercialize products.

FOOD SCIENTIST / CONAGRA FOODS NOV 2006 – SEPT 2009

Developed new frozen food products for well-known brands, applying expertise in raw materials and product management to enhance brand portfolios. Collaborated with Operations, Quality, Marketing, and Finance to commercialize products from concept to shelf.

R&D INTERN / CONAGRA FOODS MAY 2004 – JAN 2005

MANAGER, R&D / TREEHOUSE FOODS FEB 2016 – AUG 2019

Managed team of 4 Food Scientists supporting \$70MM net sales private label refrigerated dough business, executed customer sales presentations, sensory testing, raw material specifications, and collaborated with business partners. Maintained department budget led employee recognition initiatives, and drove educational series for all staff development. Collaborated with Operations and Quality to implement continuous improvement efforts and raw material efficiency.

NEW PRODUCT DEV. MANAGER / REMBRANDT FOODS SEPT 2009 – MAR 2012

Developed liquid and dried egg products for food service and commercial and bakery applications. Carried out all aspects of product quality, analytical and sensory testing, sourcing, and writing all raw material and finished product quality specs, collaborated with operations executing customer trials, and led customer sales presentations to key QSR accounts.

ASSOCIATE FOOD TECHNOLOGIST / CONAGRA FOODS JAN 2005 – NOV 2006

Gained valuable experience in raw materials, design of experiment product testing, and product management, laying the foundation for a successful career in food science and technology.

QA INTERN / TYSON FOODS MAY 2003 – AUG 2003

EDUCATION

BS / UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA LINCOLN DEC 2004

Bachelors of Science degree in Food Science and Technology with a Business emphasis.

AAS / SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE BEATRICE MAY 2002

Academic transfer coursework focusing on Math and Science.

SKILLS & PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Microsoft Office Suite, Teams, Artificial Intelligence software
- ERP & Formulation systems: CAS, SAP, Oracle, Batchmaster, Product Vision, Clarizen
- First Aid, CPR, and AED Certified
- HACCP, FSMA, and SQF Trained
- Conagra Foods Safety Floor Captain
- Conagra Canning Squad and Technical Task Force lead
- Brand Building and Evidence Based Demand Framework Trained 2023
- AIB Cookie & Cracker short course 2017
- National Egg Products School 2010
- Culinary Institute of America Fundamentals for Food Scientists 2007

ACTIVITIES

Member Nebraska Farm Bureau, Sarpy County
Member Nebraska Farm Bureau
Active member Andresen Meadows Home Owners Association
American Association of Cereal Chemists
Institute of Food Technologist
Life.Church Small Group Leader & Volunteer
Certified Personal Health Coach and Transformational Leader

REFERENCES

Michael Opat Jr.

Director Research & Development, Treehouse Foods
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(402) 490-2496

Heather Miller,

Registered Dietician, Hy-Vee
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Karen Black

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