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## People have to eat, so Wisconsin's food manufacturers have jobs

[Nathan Phelps](#), Green Bay Press-Gazette Published 8:26 a.m. CT Dec. 3, 2018 | Updated 11:03 a.m. CT Dec. 3, 2018

WISCONSIN RAPIDS – Wisconsin food manufacturers account for more than a quarter-million jobs in Wisconsin, but the industry can sometimes remain under the radar.

“The food industry is a silent industry. People just don’t think that much about it when they think of manufacturing, but food processors are manufacturers,” said Nick George, president of the [Midwest Food Products Association](#). “They, like all manufacturers, need skilled labor.”

Food manufacturers abound in eastern and central Wisconsin. There’s sausage maker [Salm Partners](#) in Denmark; [Sargento Cheese](#) in Plymouth; [Klement's Sausage Co.](#) in Milwaukee; and [McCain Foods](#) in Wisconsin Rapids, to name a few.

Schreiber Foods, a cheese and yogurt powerhouse in Green Bay, is one of the largest employers in the state lands at No. 74 in the [Forbes top 100 private businesses of 2018](#).

The food industry is seeking a wide range of workers — from the production floor to offices.

The business is increasingly automated and technical, necessitating people with technology and problem-solving skills and those with technical skills like welders versed in working with stainless steel. The industry encompasses a wide swath of jobs, including software development and data analyst.

Like almost every other industry in the state, finding skilled workers is one of the main hurdles facing food processors.

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The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development expects the state will need more than 1,000 new workers in all jobs by 2024, along with 84 more food scientists and technologists and 200 agricultural and food science technicians.

“They’re looking for people who know how to do stuff. People who can weld and work on machines,” George said.

## Food science

Among the jobs sought by [Mariani Packing Co.](#) in Wisconsin Rapids is a position for food science technician, a job requiring a science background and a bachelors degree. The last three hired by the company have come from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“The more technical, or the higher level, job is a little more difficult because we’re not only competing locally with other food manufacturers, and other manufacturers like the paper industry,” said Steve Berlyn, general manager of the Wisconsin Rapids location. “We usually have to bring them from outside the area.”

Mariani, a California-based dried fruit company, purchased the Wisconsin Rapids operation seven years ago and increased the plant size and employment from 50 to more than 150 people.

The Wisconsin Rapids plant is Mariani’s cranberry division, handling dried cranberries and cranberry concentrate. Retail packaging is part of the plant’s operation, which runs around the clock.

Both George and Berlyn point out the industry tends to weather the ups and downs of the economy.

“It’s a very stable industry because people need to eat,” Berlyn said. “If you can create a high-quality product, you’re going to be around a long time.”

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