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Chef and Cooking Careers, Jobs, and Employment Information

Chef, Cooking, and Food Preparation Career and Job Highlights

- Nearly 20 percent of cooks and food preparation workers were younger, between the ages of 16 and 19 years old.
- More than 40 percent of food preparation workers worked part-time.
- Job opportunities are anticipated to be abundant, mainly due to considerable replacement needs in this huge field.

Chef and Cooking Career Overview

Chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers may work to prepare, flavor, and cook many different kinds of foods ranging from soups, snacks, and salads to main dishes, sides, and desserts in food establishments such as restaurants. The primary responsibility of chefs and cooks is to create recipes and prepare meals. On the other hand, food preparation workers' tasks include: peeling and cutting vegetables, trimming meat, preparing poultry, maintaining cleanliness, and checking oven and stovetop temperatures.

Generally, chefs and cooks follow a recipe to prepare food by measuring, mixing, and cooking. They use an assortment of equipment including pots, pans, cutlery, ovens, broilers, grills, slicers, grinders, and blenders. Additionally, chefs and head cooks are in charge of directing other workers in the kitchen, estimating food necessities, and ordering materials.

Restaurants and food service establishments that are bigger usually obtain diverse menus and expanded kitchen staffs. They frequently have numerous chefs and cooks who are often called assistant or line cooks and less advanced kitchen workers which include food preparers. Each of the chefs and cooks work in a designated area, furnished with the types of equipment and ingredients for specific foods prepared in that area. Job titles are often associated with the main ingredient used or type of cooking, for example, vegetable cook, fry cook, or grill cook.

Executive chefs and head cooks organize and direct the kitchen which includes the staff and meals. Their responsibilities include: determining serving sizes, planning menus, ordering supplies for food, and supervising kitchen operations to make sure that the food quality and

presentation is consistent. The terms chef and cook are often thought of as the same; however, they normally mirror the varying types of chefs and the arranged structure. For example, executive chefs are responsible for merely everything regarding the food operations as well as sometimes supervising several kitchens of a hotel, restaurant group, or corporate dining operation. A chef de cuisine is over all operations of a single kitchen and reports to an executive chef. A sous chef, also called a sub chef, is just under the chef in ranking and will run the kitchen when he/she is gone. Usually, chefs have further training and higher skills than cooks. Several chefs achieve a well-known name for themselves and their kitchens through the good quality and unique nature of the food.

Most cooks' exact responsibilities are determined by several different aspects, such as the kind of restaurant they are employed by. For example, institution and cafeteria cooks generally work in the kitchens institutions, such as schools, cafeterias, businesses, and hospitals. They cook and offer a limited number of choices for entrees, vegetables, and desserts for meals. Conversely, restaurant cooks typically several types of dishes as they cook for individual orders. Short-order cooks work in restaurants and coffee shops where quick preparation time and fast service are the primary goal. They work on several orders simultaneously preparing foods like hamburgers, sandwiches, eggs, and French fries. Fast-food cooks work in fast-food restaurants where a limited menu is used. They prepare and wrap up batches of foods like hamburgers and fried chicken, so that they may stay warm until being served. Private household cooks work in a home to prepare and cook food that is desirable and fitting to the client. They may maintain needed groceries and supplies, clean and wash the kitchen and supplies, and serve meals.

Food preparation workers work under the supervision of chef and cooks to perform regular and repetitive tasks like preparing ingredients, peeling and slicing vegetables, putting together salads and other cold items, and preparing meat and poultry for cooking. Further responsibilities include: figuring out size and quantity of ingredients, searching for pots and pans, and stirring and straining soups and sauces. They also clean work areas, equipment, utensils, dishes, and silverware.

The type of food service establishment determines the type and quantity of food workers. Fast-food establishments where limited items are offered only need fast-food cooks. Little, full-service restaurants that provide casual dining usually offer a limited number items that are easy to prepare and complement then these items with short-order specialties and previously prepared desserts. Normally, a short-order cook and one or two other kitchen workers help a main cook in preparing all the food.

Grocery and specialty food stores hire chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers to create recipes and prepare to-go orders. Usually, main entrees, side dishes, salads, and further items are cooked and packaged in bulk and stored at the right temperature. Servers divide and wrap up items to meet a customer's order.

Working Conditions for Chefs, Cooks and Food Preparers

Several restaurant and institutional kitchens contain up-to-date appliances and suitable work areas with air conditioning; however, older and smaller facilities usually have kitchens not as

well designed. Kitchens must have certain safety features; they must be well ventilated, properly lit, and correctly equipped with sprinkler systems to protect against fires. Kitchen staffs always work in small areas where heat from stoves and ovens is constant. They are under expected to prepare meals rapidly, while guaranteeing food quality and safety as well as observing sanitation guidelines.

Working conditions differ according to the kind and amount of food prepared as well as local or state food regulations. Workers typically must endure the strain and tension of standing for several straight hours, maneuvering heavy pots and kettles, and functioning around hot apparatus. Injuries are hardly ever serious; however, job hazards may include slips, falls, cuts, and burns.

Restaurants work schedules may include undesirable hours in early mornings, late evenings, holidays, and weekends. Those working factory and school cafeterias may have more regular hours. In 2002, about one in three cooks and 45 percent of food preparation workers worked part-time, in contrast to 16 percent of workers in the workforce.

Varying dining hours and kitchens needing a full staff provide employment opportunities for individuals in search of supplemental income, accommodating work hours, or changeable schedules. To illustrate this, in 2002 nearly one in five cooks and food preparation workers were between 16-19 years old, and approximately 10 percent had changeable schedules.

Those working in the kitchens of schools may only work for the duration of a school year—9 or 10 months. Likewise, kitchens at resorts may only offer seasonal job opportunities as well.

Chef and Cooking Training and Job Qualifications

For the majority of fast-food or short-order cooks and workers who prepare food, modest [culinary arts education or training](#) is required, leaving most skills to be acquired on the job. Training normally begins with basic safety and sanitation guidelines and continues with training on food handling, preparation, and cooking procedures.

A high school diploma is required for individuals aspiring to become professional chefs; however, it is not required for beginning-level jobs. Programs offer through high school or vocational schools may provide education in essential food safety and handling procedures as well as general business and computer classes for students want to manage or own a food establishment. Several school districts, in compliance with State departments of education, give training through experience and summer camps for cafeteria workers who want to advance to cooks. Paid internships and summer employment are offered to beginners in this field through big corporations in the food services and hospitality industries. Internships can be beneficial, providing important experience and leading to placement in advanced chef training programs.

It is mandatory for executive chefs and head cooks working in prestigious restaurants to have several years of experience and training as well as interest in cooking. A few chefs and cooks may begin their preparation in programs at high schools or post-high school vocational schools. On the other hand, others receive the necessary training by attending independent cooking

schools, professional culinary institutes, or colleges with 2 and 4-year to obtain a hospitality or culinary arts degree. Further, selective established hotels and restaurants train their own chefs and cooks through private programs. The majority of formal training programs mandate students participate in some kind of apprenticeship, internship, or out-placement program that are mutually offered by the school and associated restaurants. Formal apprenticeship programs are sponsored by professional culinary institutes, industry associations, and trade unions in accordance with the U.S. Department of Labor. Several receive valuable work experience and instruction as they are trained on-the-job from chef tutors in the restaurants.

Education in this field may provide some benefits when looking for employment in fine restaurants. Those who have taken classes in commercial food preparation may begin as a chef or cook without first working in a lower kitchen job. A few high school vocational programs may provide training; however, training given by trade schools, vocational centers, colleges, professional institutions, or trade unions is typically first choice. Postsecondary courses vary in length of two months to two or more years, and programs offering degrees are offered only to graduate students. Master Chef positions can be acquired through competition and certification among chefs. Even though it is not required to certify to become a chef, advancing to higher positions and achieving status may require some to do it. The Armed Forces may be another way to acquire good experience and training.

Even through various curriculums may differ, students in official culinary training programs spend a fair amount of time in the kitchen learning and practicing how to prepare meals and use the proper equipment. They are instructed on cutting and knife techniques, sanitary methods for handling food, and appropriate use and maintenance of the kitchen. Courses of training programs include curriculum on nutrition, planning menus, portion sizes, methods of buying and inventory, appropriate food packaging and storage, and utilizing left-over food to reduce waste. Additionally, students are taught public health and sanitation regulations for proper food handling. A few training programs may also offer education in food service management, banquet service, and computer accounting and inventory software.

In order to meet the need, formal and informal culinary training program numbers continue to rise. Formal programs gear training to chefs for higher-end and fine-dining restaurants, so they may offer training resulting in certification or a 2 or 4-year degree. They offer several training options and specializing in focuses such as advanced cooking techniques or foods and worldwide cooking methods.

More than 100 formal training programs are accredited and several apprenticeship programs around the country are sponsored by the American Culinary Federation. Usual apprenticeships last three years and involve class work and job training. Official approval indicates that a culinary program fulfills well-known requirements concerning course material, services, and instruction quality. Additionally, the American Culinary Federation certifies pastry professionals, culinary instructors, and different levels of chefs. Standards for certification come from experience and formal training. Typically, vocational or trade-school programs present basic instruction food preparation, such as food handling and cleanliness procedures, nutrition, methods for slicing and dicing meats, and fundamental cooking methods like baking, broiling, and grilling.

Vital qualities for chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers include: cooperation with a team, a keen sense of taste and smell, efficiency in cooking meals. Because the majority of states require health certificates demonstrating that workers don't have contagious diseases, personal hygiene is a must. A foreign language may be useful in communicating with other restaurant workers or costumers.

For chefs, cooks, and other workers in food to advance, they must acquire training, work experience, and the ability to execute more responsible and refined tasks. For example, several food preparation workers may be promoted to assistant or line cook positions. Eager chefs and cooks who show a willingness to learn novel cooking skills and to take on greater responsibility may advance within the kitchen and be in charge of training or monitoring lower-skilled or beginning workers. Others may change restaurants and kitchen frequently.

A few chefs and cooks become caterers or owners of a new restaurant while others become culinary educators. Some cooks and chefs progress to executive chef or management positions in food services, especially in hotels, clubs, or up-scale restaurants.

Job and Employment Opportunities for Cooks, Chefs and Food Preparers

Through 2012, job openings for chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers are projected to be abundant; however, there should be intense competition for jobs in the top kitchens of up-scale restaurants. Most new positions are due to job growth and especially the constant turnover in this occupation. To individuals searching for first-time or temporary employment, a source of money, or an accommodating schedule, few education and training requirements and several part-time positions, make employment as chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers attractive. Several of these workers will relocate to other occupations or quit, which will open numerous positions in the field.

Throughout the 2002-2012 period, employment in general for chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. Factors causing this increase include: increases in population, bigger household incomes, and extra leisure time that allows more dining out as well as vacations. Further, a rising number of homes having two incomes will lead to the convenience and pleasure of eating out.

Employment estimates vary with specialty. The amount of higher-skilled chefs and cooks employed by full service food establishments (with table service and varied menus) is projected to grow about as fast as the average. This increase is accounted for through a rising number of casual restaurants as opposed to up-scale restaurants. Current food trends promote eating out of the home, a larger number of family restaurants, and firmer limits on expense-account meals. Fast-food cooks should expect a slower-than-average increase in employment. Since fast-food cooks have limited responsibilities, most work in positions where the jobs of food preparation and serving workers are merged, rather than just fast-food cooks. Short-order cooks should expect an increase in employment about as fast as the average. Short-order cooks may work at a specific spot, such as a grill or sand which station in a full-line restaurant; however, they may also work to serve quick meals, such in lunch counters or coffee shops.

Institution and cafeteria chefs and cooks should expect little or no increase in employment. Jobs in this area will not be able to keep up with the fast-paced growth in the educational and health services industries—where much of their employment is achieved. Offices, schools and hospitals more and more contract out their food services in hopes of making “institutional food” more attractive to office workers, students, staff, visitors, and patients. Several of the contracted food service companies focus on basic items for menus and hire short-order cooks instead of institution and cafeteria cooks, dropping the need for these workers.

Chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers who arrange to-go orders, such as those who work in specialty food stores or in the prepared foods sections of grocery, should expect an increase in employment faster than the average. This will continue as people persist to request quality meals and convenience.