



## **Cool Jobs**

### **Inside the Science of Sodas and Snacks**

To say Shalaka Narwanker is *into* food may be an understatement. She literally breaks it down to the molecular level. Shalaka is a food scientist and product developer at PepsiCo's culinary center in Valhalla, N.Y., where she explores flavorings, ingredient combinations and chemical reactions that millions of consumers enjoy, but few truly understand.

"In the lab, sometimes putting two and two together makes five or three," says Shalaka.

Starting as an intern with PepsiCo in 2007, Shalaka has applied her technical knowledge of ingredient interactions to products from Doritos to Mountain Dew. The best part about it, she explains, is that food science reaches into nearly every part of the business. One day, she's testing new colors and flavors, and discussing their appeal with the marketing team. The next day, she's working with supply chain professionals to source ingredients, and helping engineers bring the production process to life.

"I love the cross-functional collaboration," she says. "We're at the core of the innovation cycle, and it allows me to be involved in the whole process ... from ideation to commercialization."

Through it all, Shalaka balances the business of food with an appreciation for the culinary arts. She recently earned the designation of Certified Culinary Scientist (CCS) from the Research Chef's Association, the leading professional community for food research and development. The CCS certification process, much of which is available in-house at PepsiCo, requires experienced food scientists to augment their technical knowledge with 120 hours of culinary training and pass a rigorous exam. Shalaka is one of less than 200 people in the world to earn the honor, including 11 others at PepsiCo.

"I never wanted to be a chef, but I've always been inspired by different foods around the world, and my job lets me share those flavors with our consumers," she says.

With all that culinary training at her disposal, Shalaka is an avid cook at home. But she admits that the scientist in her is never completely off duty.

"I'll catch myself explaining to my husband why a recipe has certain ingredients, and how they affect the finished product," she says.

Her knowledge of the product lifecycle also plays a role in defining her favorite PepsiCo brands. "I especially like Stacy's pita chips because of the long process it takes to bake them twice," she says. And

on the beverage side? “Kickstart by Mountain Dew. It’s a mid-calorie product with bold flavors and electrolytes and is made with five percent real juice.”

Clearly, there’s a lot going on there. The same could be said about food science careers at PepsiCo.

*Do you have a cool job at PepsiCo or know someone who does? Email [SPA - PepsiCo News](#) or use the “Comment” link below to share the details. You or your team could be profiled.*