Dairy Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Dairy leadership and board

Job title	Dairy Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Department	Dairy leadership and board
Reports to	Chief Executive Officer
Direct reports	Site or plant directors, Head of Engineering, Head of Supply Chain, Head of Quality and Food Safety, Head of Health and Safety, and Head of Milk Collection
Location	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*
Contract type	*[Permanent / fixed-term / other]*
Salary and benefits	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*

Job purpose

Leads all operations of the dairy business, from milk collection to processing, packing and distribution. Makes sure products are made safely, to the right quality and at competitive cost, and that plant capacity and investment keep pace with milk supply and customer demand. Works with the Chief Executive and executive team to turn strategy into operational plans and results.

Key responsibilities

Operations strategy and planning

- Develop the operations strategy and plan in line with the strategy agreed by the Board
- Match plant capacity to milk supply, seasonal peaks and customer demand
- Lead sales and operations planning with the commercial, milk supply and finance teams
- Decide which plants make which products to get the best return from milk across market cycles

Manufacturing performance

- Oversee the safe, efficient running of all plants, including liquid milk, cheese, butter and powder
- Set and track targets for yield, throughput, efficiency, energy use and cost per litre
- Drive continuous improvement through lean methods and shared best practice between sites
- Ensure plant is maintained so it is safe, reliable and ready when milk arrives

Supply chain and logistics

- Run milk collection so that milk is collected, tested and delivered on time and in good condition
- Oversee the purchase of packaging, ingredients, energy and services with the procurement team
- Manage warehousing and distribution to retail, food-service and export customers
- Plan for disruption from weather, transport problems, energy supply and plant failure

Health and safety and food safety

- Lead a strong health and safety culture and act to prevent serious injuries
- Ensure food safety and quality systems meet regulatory, customer and certification requirements

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- Lead the operational response to food safety incidents, product recalls and site emergencies
- Make sure plants comply with environmental permits and safety regulations

Capital investment and sustainability

- Prepare investment cases for new capacity, automation and plant renewal for Board approval
- Deliver major capital projects safely, on time and within budget
- Reduce emissions, water use, energy use and waste across plants and logistics
- Report operational sustainability performance to the executive team and the Board

Leadership and people

- Lead, develop and hold operations leaders to account for safety, quality, cost and service
- Plan workforce needs, shift patterns, skills and succession with HR
- Build constructive relationships with employees and their representatives

Qualifications and experience

Essential

- Extensive senior operations leadership experience in dairy or food manufacturing
- Track record of running multi-site manufacturing operations safely and efficiently
- Strong knowledge of dairy processing, food safety systems and HACCP
- Experience of planning and delivering major capital projects
- Experience of managing large operating budgets
- Proven ability to lead and develop senior managers

Desirable

- Degree in dairy science, food technology, engineering or a related discipline
- Lean manufacturing or Six Sigma qualification
- Recognised health and safety qualification
- Experience of milk collection and dairy supply chain logistics
- Experience of running operations in more than one country

Skills and attributes

- Operational leadership
- Planning and prioritisation
- Data-driven decision making
- Problem solving under pressure
- Financial and commercial awareness
- Leading change
- Clear communication at all levels

Measures of success

- Lost-time injury rate and serious incidents
- Food safety incidents, recalls and audit results
- Conversion cost per litre and operating costs against budget
- Yield, plant efficiency and capacity utilisation
- On-time, in-full delivery to customers
- Energy, water and emissions per tonne of product

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Working conditions and safety

Based at head office or a main site with frequent travel to plants, depots and suppliers. PPE and hygiene rules apply in production areas, and the role includes on-call cover for serious incidents.

- Lead by example on health, safety, food safety and animal welfare
- Uphold the code of conduct and all legal and compliance requirements
- Raise concerns and report incidents promptly

This job description outlines the main duties of the role. It is not a complete list, and the employer may update it as the business changes, in consultation with the jobholder.

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