Dairy Microbiologist

Quality and laboratory

Job title	Dairy Microbiologist
Department	Quality and laboratory
Reports to	Laboratory Manager (or Technical Manager on sites without one)
Direct reports	None (may supervise laboratory technicians on shift)
Location	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*
Contract type	*[Permanent / fixed-term / other]*
Salary and benefits	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*

Job purpose

Runs the microbiological testing that checks dairy products, raw milk, water and the plant itself are safe. Tests for pathogens, indicator organisms and spoilage organisms, runs the environmental monitoring programme, and reports results honestly and quickly. Keeps the laboratory audit-ready and, where it is accredited, to the accreditation standard, and helps production find and fix the source of any problem.

Key responsibilities

Testing and results

- Test raw milk, in-process product, finished product, water and cleaning rinse water to the agreed sampling plan
- Run total viable count, coliform and Enterobacteriaceae, yeast and mould, and psychrotroph tests on raw milk, pasteurised milk and products
- Test for pathogens including Listeria (monocytogenes and species), Salmonella, Staphylococcus aureus and Bacillus cereus, and for Cronobacter in infant formula
- Test milk powders for thermophilic bacteria and spores
- Follow recognised methods exactly (ISO methods or validated rapid kits) and record every step
- Report results on time so product held under positive release can be cleared or kept on hold
- Treat any result outside the limit as a failure, however small the margin. Confirm a presumptive positive or out-of-specification result by the method, never dismiss it, and keep the product on hold while the investigation runs

Environmental monitoring and investigations

- Run the environmental monitoring programme: zone the factory and swab food-contact surfaces, equipment, drains, floors and hand-contact surfaces to a set schedule
- Step up swabbing around any positive to find the source
- Trend results over time and raise a drift before it becomes a failure
- Lead the laboratory side of root cause investigations with production and hygiene
- Check that corrective actions have worked through follow-up swabbing

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Laboratory systems and accreditation

- Use aseptic technique at all times and train others in it
- Prepare culture media and check each batch with positive and negative controls
- Check incubators, autoclaves and water baths daily, and keep calibration and maintenance records up to date
- Take part in proficiency testing schemes and act on any poor score
- Run the laboratory quality system, including method validation and internal audits, to ISO/IEC 17025 where the business chooses accreditation
- Meet food safety and laboratory safety regulations as required where the job is based
- Keep stocks of media, reagents and consumables, autoclave cultures and dispose of laboratory waste safely

Working with production and quality

- Feed results into the HACCP plan and verify that critical controls are working
- Support shelf-life studies and new product trials with testing and advice
- Explain results in plain words to production managers and operators
- Help the Quality Manager answer customer and regulator questions
- Support customer, certification and regulator audits of the laboratory
- Supervise laboratory technicians on shift where required

Qualifications and experience

Essential

- Degree in microbiology, food science or a related subject
- Experience in a food or dairy microbiology laboratory
- Sound aseptic technique and laboratory discipline
- Accurate record keeping and data handling
- Clear reporting of results, including bad news
- Able to work the laboratory rota, which may include weekends

Desirable

- Experience of ISO/IEC 17025 or similar accreditation
- Experience with rapid methods or PCR
- HACCP training
- Experience of environmental monitoring programmes and Listeria control
- Experience with milk powders or infant formula
- Experience of audits by customers and regulators

Skills and attributes

- Attention to detail
- Honesty
- Methodical working
- Curiosity about root causes
- Calm under pressure when a positive comes in
- Clear communication with non-scientists

Measures of success

- Results reported on time and right first time
- No positive or out-of-specification result goes unreported or unactioned
- Environmental monitoring completed to schedule
- Proficiency tests passed
- Audits passed with no major findings

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- Investigations closed with a verified corrective action

Working conditions and safety

Laboratory based, with regular time in production areas for sampling and swabbing. The work involves handling cultures, chemicals and hot equipment under laboratory safety rules, and may include shift or weekend cover on sites that run seven days. PPE and training are provided.

- Follow health and safety rules and safe systems of work, and wear the correct PPE
- Follow food safety, hygiene, HACCP and quality procedures at all times
- Report hazards, accidents, near misses and concerns 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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