

AFFPA IN ACTION

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ALBERTA FOOD PROCESSORS ASSOCIATION

WINTER
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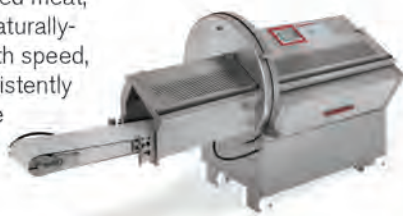
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Eric Haak
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"In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists."
— Eric Hoffer

HELLO AFPA MEMBERS,

To start, I would like to thank each of you for the support you have shown our association over the last year. Your membership and your support of our Food Safety and Workplace Safety programs have made such a difference to our continued impact as the premier network for our industry. As the Alberta Food Processing Association (AFPA) moves into our 48th year representing Alberta's food processing sector, I know that this association is the perfect hub to distribute information and represent our member's needs — now, and into the future. AFPA knows and understands the heartbeat of our industry, and we bring what is needed to partner together to ensure success for your company.

While we recognize the importance of looking to the past, AFPA understands that our changed world means we must always be looking forward. What is needed? How can we best assist our members in their efforts to navigate our ever-changing industry? I am excited to say that a new future awaits for AFPA and for our members. When government support ran out, we adapted and we're thrilled by the support our members have shown about the direction we're going. The last few years have been challenging, but AFPA is ready for the future and enthusiastic about helping our members traverse the landscape.

The most exciting venture we have in the works is the coming deployment of AFPA On-Demand, which is

highlighted in this issue of *AFPA in ACTION*. Please read this issue's cover story as it highlights some of the opportunities available to help your business grow. AFPA's toolbox is full of solutions, up-to-date information, and opportunities!

Of course, we will always make opportunities for personal contact, but the world has changed and the demand for online solutions has never been greater. As we develop this new to us engagement, we will continue to update you on the services available. We are working hard on your behalf to establish the things that are needed, with the flexibility to change and adjust as our world changes.

AFPA is committed to bringing you what is relevant, based on the realities of our present world, with the courage to adjust the sails, when necessary. As William Arthur Ward stated, "*The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.*"

Stand with us as we adjust the sails to match the influences of our changing world. We are ready for the ride. I welcome your comments and feedback about all that AFPA offers. Please reach out with questions, suggestions, and concerns.

Eric Haak
AFPA Chair
Sunrise Bakery Ltd.



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ON THE
COVER

Click to www.afpaondemand.com to explore the future of food and beverage industry related training.

AFPA ON-DEMAND: THE FUTURE IS HERE

When was the last time you stood in line for hours to buy a pair of concert tickets? Or trekked across town in a snowstorm to pick up take-out? Why would you, when all of those things are just a simple click away? All around us, everyday, are signs that we truly live in an on-demand, digital world. We can access virtually anything by the simple click of a mouse or scroll of a smartphone. Movie tickets? Click. Groceries delivered to your door step? Not a problem! Click. Click. Click. The COVID-19 pandemic massively accelerated our transition to this new digital reality. People who would have never otherwise ordered groceries online, discovered how easy and convenient it actually is. Maybe that take-out delivery service isn't so bad, after-all. And although you may be hard pressed to find a parent to actually agree with this statement, even homeschooling had its advantages.

Although most of us cannot wait to put the restrictions brought on by the pandemic behind us, we are far less keen to shed the comforts and conveniences that came along with it. Like it or loathe it, the modern era of online digital access is here... and unlike the virus, its not going anywhere. How do all these changes in our day-to-day lives impact the way we go about business in the food processing industry? The answer is simple. It doesn't take long for technologies we use in our personal lives to trickle down to the workplace. This is perhaps most evident in the way forward-thinking businesses are embracing online learning technologies to gain a competitive advantage.

Over the past two years, businesses in the food processing sector have had to rapidly adapt to changing markets, supply chain disruptions, staffing shortages, and COVID-19. And now a new challenge: the speed with which all industries are embracing advanced technologies to strengthen their workforce. Access to quality workplace health and safety training can make or break any company. Ensuring that your workers go home safe at the end of every shift should be the number one priority of any employer. Given the inherent challenges and

dangers we, as an industry, are forced to contend with on a daily basis, this is especially true of food processors.

The food processing industry is the largest in Alberta, and within the sector there are regrettably a high frequency of workplace injuries. According to the Worker's Compensation Board, in 2018, approximately three in 100 employees in the manufacturing, packing, and processing sector in Alberta were injured on the job. Of those incidents 15% involved the fingers and 13% involved hands and wrists. These figures highlight the inherent hazards involved in equipment demonstration and equipment training itself. The act of demonstrating can pose unique risks for both the demonstrator and the observer. E-learning and training resources, like Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), have the power to change all that.

AR and VR technologies are paving the way for enhanced safety in the food processing industry. Such state-of-the-art advancements allow for the delivery of workforce safety training in an immersive environment that closely imitates real-world conditions. These technologies use headsets, sensors, and 360 cameras to create a 3-D replica of a worker's actual workplace environment. This allows them to train effectively and efficiently — learning the ins and outs of how to operate dangerous, complex equipment — while incurring absolutely no actual risk of physical harm or injury. The implications of these technologies on workplace health and safety are both obvious and undeniable, but there are other benefits as well.

Research shows that E-Learning technologies yield higher learning retention rates than lecture-style or reading-based methods. In fact, a recent Forbes study shows that E-learning can increase student retention rates by 25% to 60%. This is particularly true for the next generations of workers like millennials and Generation Z workers, who have grown up and are comfortable learning via virtual simulation. Online training is fast, convenient, cost effective, and can be custom-tailored to a company's individual needs. All these things are important to a generation of workers that values training and workplace development. According to LinkedIn, 87% of millennials and 69% of non-millennials consider career development to be an important part of a job and four out of five millennials say having an opportunity to learn a new skill is the top factor when considering a new employment opportunity.

With a strong dependence on graphics and hands-on learning, VR and AR technologies are also effective in bridging the communication gap with new Canadians, a particularly large demographic in the food processing industry. Individuals retain information better when presented in VR format. This directly translates to better training and safety outcomes, as well as improved rates of retention, attraction, and worker-satisfaction.

AFPA recognizes that employee safety, satisfaction, worker engagement, and access to quality Workplace Health and Safety training are critical to ensuring the competitive advantage of its membership. With these



industry challenges top of mind, AFPA has partnered with Playcanics — an industry leader in E-learning, learning design, and 3D training — to develop AFPA On-Demand, a suite of interactive, engaging, and fully customized online training courses.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

Designed for industry by industry, AFPA On-Demand focuses training on key food processing areas, such as: good manufacturing practices, workplace industrial safety, food processing equipment, and life critical areas like Lock Out-Tag Out (LOTO), energy isolation, and safeguarding. AFPA is a one-stop hub to access industry-leading online learning content. Launching this Fall, members will have access to 3D equipment, incident investigation, and hazard assessment forms.

All On-Demand courses have been designed in a blended learning format. Materials are easy to access on desktops, tablets and smart phones. You can use them exclusively online or you can download print-based resources to use inside a classroom or a safety meeting. These tools have not been designed to replace on-the-job training, but are great at priming staff for that process, for conducting regular reviews, and for bringing safety meetings to the next level. Regardless of your level of digital infrastructure, these materials will be of use to you.

AFPA On-Demand has the potential to revolutionize the way our industry tackles the issue of workplace health and safety. If the ongoing global pandemic has taught us anything, it's that agility and adaptability — especially in essential sectors like the food processing industry—are necessary in times of crisis. There are few things as important as ensuring that quality food products remain on Alberta shelves. This platform provides our sector with quality, industry-curated, easy to access training formats that will keep our workers safe and our businesses competitive in an on-demand, virtual world. 🍌



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FIXING THE LABOUR PROBLEM: WHERE WILL WE FIND 35,000+ NEW WORKERS?



By Jennefer Griffith, Executive Director at Food Processing Skills Canada

Earlier this year, Food Processing Skills Canada released its latest labour market report, *At the Crossroad to Greatness — Key Insights & Labour Market Research About Canada's Food and Beverage Processing Industry*. We chose the title *At the Crossroad to Greatness* because we know the industry in Canada is ready to expand to meet increasing global food demand, but the labour challenge is severely constraining growth.

Our analysis showed that in 2020 the Canadian industry directly employed 280,000 people and had a critical labour shortage. For complete details on employment gaps download the report, but to summarize, we have also calculated that by 2025 the industry requires a minimum of 35,000 new people and at least 56,000 new people to achieve its potential.

Each job vacancy is costing businesses as much as \$190 per day in lost revenue. We learned from employers that they had an average of six vacant positions, which across the country totals a staggering average daily industry revenue loss of \$8.5 million per day or \$3.1 billion per year.

In Alberta, we know that there are 641 employers. Applying the same assumptions leads us to 3,846 vacancies which is costing the sector \$730,740 per day or approximately \$267 million per year. That's a big number that if not addressed will impact growth of Alberta's food and beverage processing businesses.

However, with 91% of the 7,600 businesses across the Canadian industry employing less than 100 people, making the important upgrades to workplace culture, continuous learning and recruitment and retention strategies can be difficult. Even before COVID-19, businesses were pushed to the limit and profit margins lean. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the labour market is further proving to be extremely tight.

We have learned that the biggest challenge

for employers is accessing a pool of qualified candidates with 68% of employers facing recruitment and retention challenges. With only one in four Canadians familiar with the food and beverage processing industry, it is easy to see that the industry has to raise its profile and focus on talent attraction.

Over the years, Food Processing Skills Canada has developed a number of workforce programs and resources like the Canadian Food Processors Institute, Food Skills Library and FoodCert — all of which are easily accessible to employers. Our latest initiatives have also been designed to provide immediate support to businesses.

Succeeding at Work Employer is offering free, online training to employee teams to upgrade technical and social-emotional skills, particularly important when people need coping tools for COVID-19 stressors.

Language Stream is translating proven e-courses into multiple languages to support newcomers and English as a second language employees in the workplace.

iFood 360° is introducing new virtual reality training at a time when physical distancing is impacting previous learning strategies that relied on facility classroom settings.

Student Work Placement Program+ is simplifying access to post-secondary students and providing wage subsidies of up to \$7,500 for employers to attract new skills and future leaders.

Canadian Certified Industrial Meat Cutter Level 1 is raising the standards of the meat cutter profession by recognizing individuals for their skills and performance.

To learn more about Food Processing Skills Canada and how the organization can support Alberta businesses visit www.fpsc-ctac.com or contact our team. 🌸

Food Processing Skills Canada is the Canadian food and beverage processing industry's workforce development non-profit organization located in Ottawa with regional representatives supporting businesses across the country.



FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GMP, HACCP, GFSI AND SFCR?



Food safety is an important concern for every food business. When you have a food safety program, you greatly diminish the risks and expense of a product recall because you can quickly identify what batch of your products are affected by bad quality and only recall those products.

SAFE FOOD FOR CANADIAN REGULATIONS (SFCR)

Most Canadian food companies need to comply with the Safe Food for Canadian Regulations (SFCR), a federal standard introduced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in January 2019. SFCR covers consumer protections requirements for labelling, packaging, standards of identity, grades, and net quantity.

As the new benchmark for food safety across the country, SFCR applies to food for human consumption (including ingredients) that is

imported, exported, or traded across provincial borders for commercial purposes.

"If you have any retail aspirations across Canada, you need to get SFCR licensed," explains Rowda Mohamud, Senior Business Advisor, BDC Advisory Services. "It's a binary scenario: either you have an SFCR license and are allowed to sell your food products interprovincially, or you don't, and then you stay at home in your own province and you don't grow."

If a major supermarket chain wants to stock your products, then your business must comply with SFCR, as the supermarket chain will likely distribute the product across multiple locations in different provinces. The SFCR license is like a business permit — you wouldn't want to operate without one — and it helps you grow your business.

To be SFCR licensed, companies must have a rigorous food safety program based on the Hazard

Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) methodology. However, your company doesn't need to be HACCP certified, it only needs to demonstrate that you have implemented the right controls.

GMP, HACCP, AND GFSI

Think of the different food quality programs as climbing up the stairs. At the foot of the stairs are the GMP, which stands for Good Manufacturing Practices, which is the minimum that any business should have.

GMPs lay the groundwork for the production and preparation of safe food in several general areas, such as pest control, sanitation, and employee hygiene. GMPs can be seen as the equivalent of the prerequisite programs to HACCP.

The main difference between HACCP and GMP is that HACCP adds requirements for risk mitigation around your products and

Did you know that AFPA also offers **food safety training as well as consulting services?** Learn more at www.afpa.com or email info@afpa.com, and flip to page 22 to learn about **AFPA's custom safety templates!**





ingredients, as well as requirements for traceability requirements.

HACCP is mostly equivalent to the new government food safety regulations. If you have HACCP certification, you will be well-prepared for the SFCR licensing. You don't need to be HACCP certified to be government licensed for export outside your province; you only need to show compliance with SFCR which are largely HACCP-equivalent.

The next level up from HACCP is GFSI, which is a series of norms. The three most popular for Canadian retailers are BRC, SQF, and FSSC 22000. The three are considered equivalent, but businesses will prefer one or the other based on their experience and geographical location.

GFSI norms are even more stringent than those for HACCP, so, for example, they require verification of medical antecedents for employees and a food defense plan. GFSI

also has additional requirements for suppliers.

GFSI certification will often open doors to large international clients. "The idea of the GSFI is to facilitate trade by ensuring you have a food safety system that is internationally acceptable and can give confidence to your customers in foreign markets," says Mohamud.

AN INVESTMENT THAT PAYS OFF

Getting food safety-certified is not just important for keeping your consumers safe and healthy — it keeps your business safe and healthy as well.

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WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY: A MUST FOR OUR INDUSTRY



By Ed DeGroot

Alberta Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) legislation sets the *minimum standards* for workplace health and safety. Sadly, many processors are not compliant in meeting these required minimum standards, at the expense of their employees.

Much has changed since 2018, and even more changes came into effect December 1, 2021. Our industry **MUST** fully embrace implementing a formal health and safety program/management system — with a Health and Safety Committee/Rep. It's good business and good for your business, and AFPA is here to help.

Alberta OHS Officers are visiting businesses in our industry and

they're issuing formal orders where warranted, so take action. It is the mission of the AFPA to assist members with their goal of achieving a workplace safety program. This should include the implementation of a formal health and safety program, meeting minimum compliance requirements, and/or maintaining or formally attaining the Certificate of Recognition (COR).

CHANGES TO THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY (OHS) ACT AND REVISED REGULATIONS EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 1, 2021

Updated laws support workplace safety. These changes add flexibility and clarity, and put all health and safety laws under one Act while

continuing to protect worker safety rights (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/changes-to-ohs-laws>). It is critical that you have the most current version of the OHS legislation available to workers. Order your official copies from the Alberta's Queen Printer (www.alberta.ca/alberta-queens-printer.aspx).

You can direct workers to the online version and you must have at least one hard copy at your workplace.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

It is now an expectation in all Alberta workplaces that diversity, equity, and inclusion are being properly recognized for workers. This further ties into updated

company harassment and violence protocols. There is very specific content/wording required in your company's documentation.

According to OHS legislation, all workers have three basic rights:

- **The Right to Know** (be informed) of worksite hazards, means to control such hazards, emergency response plans, and results of inspections and investigations.
- **The Right to Participate** in health and safety activities pertaining to their worksite, such as the ability to express concerns, attend meetings, be involved in inspections, investigations and/or ERP drills, exercises, and development, and to serve on the H&S committee.
- **The Right to Refuse** dangerous work.

TOO MUCH HEALTH AND SAFETY, YOU SAY?

Well, we say there is no such thing. Why don't you ask your

family for that answer and get back to us? When it comes to safety at your workplace, you must understand that your employees are on loan to your organization from their families. You have a **legal, ethical, and moral** obligation to keep them safe, regardless of order requirements or customer needs. You must, by law, provide a safe and healthy working environment for every worker. You are expected to return them home safely — every single day. Training, knowledge, education, evaluating competency, and management support is required...daily.

AFPA: YOUR ADVOCATE FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

AFPA is the food and beverage processing industry's advocate and leading safety resource for ensuring the continuous improvement of workplace health and safety programs. How can AFPA assist your company in its goal

of meeting critical OHS requirements? Via training and consulting? Yes, and yes. AFPA will build a fully compliant, detailed, and comprehensive health and safety management system for your organization.

We will help you implement it with company leadership and employees at all levels by providing specific information, training, and program development over a four-to six-month timeline. Contact AFPA for your safety training, consulting services, resources and various materials needs.

WORKPLACE SAFETY COMPETENCE: ARE YOU THERE YET?

The key supervisor competency requirements now tied into minimum OHS legislation that "both the employers and all supervisors* are expected to ensure" includes them having formal training in hazard assessment, incident investigation, and OHS

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roles and responsibilities. *Supervisors include those who direct the work of others, by any title, including foreman and shift/team lead.

Why, you may ask? Well, supervisors are expected to lead the hazard assessment process, which includes reviews, worker engagement, changes, and/or updates. They must also conduct investigations when appropriate, including work refusals, so they need to be properly trained.

This safety training is also required for select managers and health and safety committee members, as related to their roles, duties, and functions in serving on the committee. Workers must also be provided with adequate job and safety training, then be deemed as competent via a "show me" component to their critical job responsibilities as part of the annual review process. You can contact AFPA to learn more about these new OHS compliance requirements and related training.

HEALTH AND SAFETY VS. FOOD SAFETY (HACCP): WHICH IS FIRST?

These programs are NOT in a competition and will often dovetail off each other in regards to the overall specific requirements within each program. Alberta OHS is a legislated and mandatory compliance requirement for any food or beverage organization. It IS the law. Other management systems, while meeting very specific regulatory requirements, are still adopted voluntarily.



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MEMBERS PRAISE AFPA'S HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAM

"Working with Ed and Melody at AFPA on building our occupational health and safety program was a great experience. It was invaluable having them explain what the government is looking for in terms of specific documentation, wording, and procedures that I would never have known had I tried to do it on my own. They are a wealth of information, patient, and kept me on track. I was considering doing it on my own and I now realize that it would have taken me twice as long and likely costed much more by the end. I highly recommend working with AFPA if you are setting up an occupational health and safety program. At the end, I had a program and a professional, detailed manual with all the information that I needed and I have no concerns about passing an OHS inspection, and that alone is priceless. Peace of mind has been achieved."

— Sean, Pre Pak Meats

AFPA'S FOOD AND BEVERAGE HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER (F&BHSO) PROGRAM

AFPA's F&BHSO designation is for those individuals wishing to achieve formal recognition for their efforts and commitment to workplace safety. Successful candidates must complete key requirements. Should you or anyone in your organization be interested in achieving this great new safety designation, contact AFPA. Who will become the next F&BHSO? It's really up to you!

WORKPLACE SAFETY: WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR 2022?

Take time to reflect on 2021; COVID-19 was a harsh reality for everyone worldwide and now we must look ahead to 2022. Have your efforts made any real impact on your workplace? On your employee's health and safety? What key lessons were learned? Were also shared? Do specific areas of your program need improvement? What would directly or indirectly make your workplace even safer? What, if any, are your OHS priorities for 2022? Is there key AFPA safety training you can provide to your staff? How will you generate enthusiasm and commitment to your health and safety priorities in 2022, based on all the new minimum requirements? Lastly, ***do you understand that safety is a company value and is not a competing priority?*** 🌸

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INOVATA FOODS: THE COR OF OUR SUCCESS



With a 95,000 square foot facility 100 miles from the American border and another 45,000 square feet of SFQ Level 2 manufacturing space in Edmonton, Inovata Foods is North America's premier manufacturer of private label and co-packed frozen entrees for retail, club stores, and food services. A family owned and operated business since 1989, Inovata prides itself on creating wholesome and convenient meals that bring family and friends together.

Consumer preference for frozen food products has risen steadily the past few years. In 2019, Food Manufacture Magazine reported a 4% year over year increase in demand for frozen food. Global demand has been driven, in large part, by a consumer appetite for convenient products that require significantly less time and effort than preparing a meal from scratch. As expected, the recent COVID-19 pandemic — with its government-imposed shut-downs and restrictions forced upon the restaurant industry — resulted in a further uptick in frozen entrée sales. With these factors in mind, Inovata intends to increase both its production capabilities and sales by 40% over the course of the next five years.

With nearly 20 years industry experience, Chief Operating Officer James Stevens understands that it takes a lot more than favourable market conditions to achieve growth projections like that. "We hire, train, promote and

do business using the core values in our RECIPE for success: Respect, Engagement, Courage, Integrity, Passion and Excellence." For nearly 30 years, Inovata's track record for manufacturing excellence, innovative R&D, professionalism, and competitive pricing models have been central to their success.

Both manufacturing facilities are CFIA registered meat processing plants, Safe Quality Food (SQF) certified, and have recognized HACCP plans that ensure food safety. In September 2020, Inovata's Occupational Health & Safety Management System successfully underwent an external audit to achieve its Certificate of Recognition (COR).

AFPA has partnered with the Ministry of Labour and the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) to offer the COR Partnership Program to our members. This is a voluntary program designed to help you lower your premiums by encouraging injury prevention and the development of effective workplace health, safety, and return-to-work plans. A COR certification shows that the employer's Health and Safety Management System (HSMS) has been evaluated by a certified auditor and meets provincial standards established by Partnerships in Injury Reduction (PIR). Among its many benefits are creating a proactive workplace health and safety culture, improving the overall efficiency at your work site, reducing the risks and costs associated with workplace incidents, lowering WCB rates, and qualifying for WCB PIR refunds. By participating in this program, AFPA members have the opportunity to receive refunds up to 20% of their annual WCB premiums.

"The savings benefit of COR certification alone makes it all worthwhile", says Elise Lamothe, Human Resources Generalist with Inovata Foods. But the safety culture element is also extremely important. "Inovata feels a special commitment to ensure our workers not only go home safe, but feel supported and understand their worker rights." With a workforce involving a large percentage of new Canadians or English as a second-language employees, it is important they feel supported in situations like refusing unsafe work and speaking up when an incident occurs. The COR program demands that all employees — from a worker on the packing floor all the way up to the CEO — have a firm understanding of the program and its requirements.

Achieving COR certification is a lengthy process; one that requires significant training, tracking, and communication. "It is important you truly understand the level of time management and overall effort involved", says Lamothe. "Having support and buy in from every level is crucial. Whether its training to earn your designation or following through with maintenance once it has been achieved, COR is a day-to-day commitment."



PLAYCANICS: A REAL GAME CHANGER

C OVID-19 has permanently changed the way we do business. Keeping up with technology may have once been seen as a luxury; it is now critical to competing in today's 'digital-by-default' post-pandemic world. The past 18 months have forced the food processing sector to adapt rapidly to changing markets, supply chain disruptions, staffing shortages, and COVID-19 outbreaks. From dairy producers to large-scale suppliers, businesses large and small require technological resources that can meet the needs of our ever-changing global workplace. AFPA recognizes these challenges and has doubled down on its commitment to build the competitive advantage of our members through quality training, effective promotion, and by being the voice of the Alberta food processing industry.

AFPA has partnered with Playcanics — an industry leader in E-learning, learning design, and 3D training — to develop AFPA OnDemand, a suite of immersive and highly engaging online training courses. Along with a newly designed website, AFPA members will have access to advanced training technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) simulations and 360 videos. Courses will focus on best practices, workplace industrial safety, food processing equipment, as well as life critical areas such as Lock-Out-Tag-Out (LOTO), Energy Isolation, and Safeguarding.

Online learning is a field on everyone's radar with its ability to service large numbers of trainees, remotely and efficiently. With team members positioned throughout the country, Playcanics is available to collaborate with organizations large and small to elevate their training and safety practices to the next level.

Jessica Haak, Playcanics founder and Senior Learning Experience Designer, understands all too well the needs and challenges facing today's food processors. "I am a food processing kid myself. My family has been in the industry 60 years. Three generations. Food Processors need a functional, high-performing product with good margins, that is well tailored to the correct sub sector. They need products that understand the multi-cultural aspect of the industry, that

keep their staff safe, and leverage the talents of their OHS team on site as well as their trainers in an economical way."

VR and 360 video have revolutionized workplace safety. In this simulated environment, you can expose a trainee to a variety of workplace hazards without taking any actual risk of physical harm or injury. A worker can train on a piece of equipment for days before ever actually turning it on. This is a game changer for the food processing industry. "VR training gives your staff room to fail where the only consequence is having to repeat their last step. In a real-world facility those stakes are much higher," says Haak.

The immersive power of VR is what makes it an incredibly powerful tool. You feel like you are in another space when you put on a headset because it activates your eyes, your ears, and your balance centers. Researchers have found that people remember information better when presented in VR format. Unlike reading a page from a textbook, a virtual reality experience allows the user to commit what they experience in simulation to memory. This has enormous implications for training and workplace health and safety, not to mention a company's bottom line.

Beyond training, VR technology has proven massively beneficial in the areas of hiring and employee retention, particularly when it comes to individuals with disabilities, new Canadians, and hard-to-engage demographics like millennials and Generation Z workers. With virtual reality, the user actively experiences their simulated environment and becomes emotionally invested in what they are viewing. This is the future of how we do business.

It is never too early to invest in digital infrastructure. For years now, online learning has been promoted as a flexible and streamlined way to deliver educational content. The pandemic brought those benefits to the forefront. Our industry will never be the same. Those that adapt quickly will find themselves ahead. Those that do not will struggle in a post-pandemic reality. Through its partnership with Playcanics, AFPA has guaranteed its members a competitive advantage in the modern age of industrial training technology. 🌸

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AFPA would like to recognize these corporate sponsors for their support of AFPA members over the years. If you're interested in becoming a sponsor, contact info@afpa.com. There are options to fit all budgets! **For more information, visit www.afpa.com/about_sponsorship.**

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