



Taking the Pathway

Understanding
career direction in
distilling





Food Processing Skills Canada

At Food Processing Skills Canada, our mission is to make certain that the Canadian food and beverage manufacturing sector is building an empowered and resilient workforce that is primed for growth.

We create industry-driven programs for Canada’s 13,000+ food and beverage manufacturing establishments and the sector’s 300,000+ people so that businesses and individuals can achieve their goals.

We are passionate about ensuring that Canadians, new immigrants, and temporary foreign workers have the training and confidence to successfully begin an exciting job or advance their career. We also want employers and educators to have the right resources so that they can nurture talent and create the perfect learning environment.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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About Taking the Pathway

Canada's Agri-Food sector is a significant contributor to our nation's economy and was recently identified as one of Canada's top growth industries over the next 10 years. Despite this, the sector continues to face a critical labour shortage that, if left unresolved, will impede the industry's growth, employment opportunities, and overall sustainability.

How to Use the Career Pathway

This document provides practical information about the career paths available for workers involved in the distilling industry. In a time when attraction and recruitment of workers is important to keep up with demand, the career ladder can be helpful to educate potential workers about the opportunities and career pathways within the sector. The career ladder is a helpful tool for employers to attract, recruit and retain productive and skilled workers.

The career pathway for Distillers illustrates the progression of foundational level to management level positions. Definitions for these occupational levels can be found in **Appendix A**.

Canada has Spirit(s)!

As of December 2022, there are over 200 distillers in Canada, with the majority being located in the province of Quebec, followed by British Columbia and Ontario.¹

There are a full range of spirits produced in Canada - and around the world - including brandy, gin, liqueur, rum, tequila, vodka, and whisky. Each spirit has its own raw ingredients, process, and aging time. To learn more about the various kinds of spirits, check out: <https://grandwineandspirits.com/spirit-guide/>



Did You Know?

Canada is known, worldwide, for its Canadian whisky - a product distilled from cereal grains and aged in oak barrels for a minimum of three years. Learn more about the history of Canadian Whisky here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kDwoJw87Kk&ab_channel=InSearchofElegance.



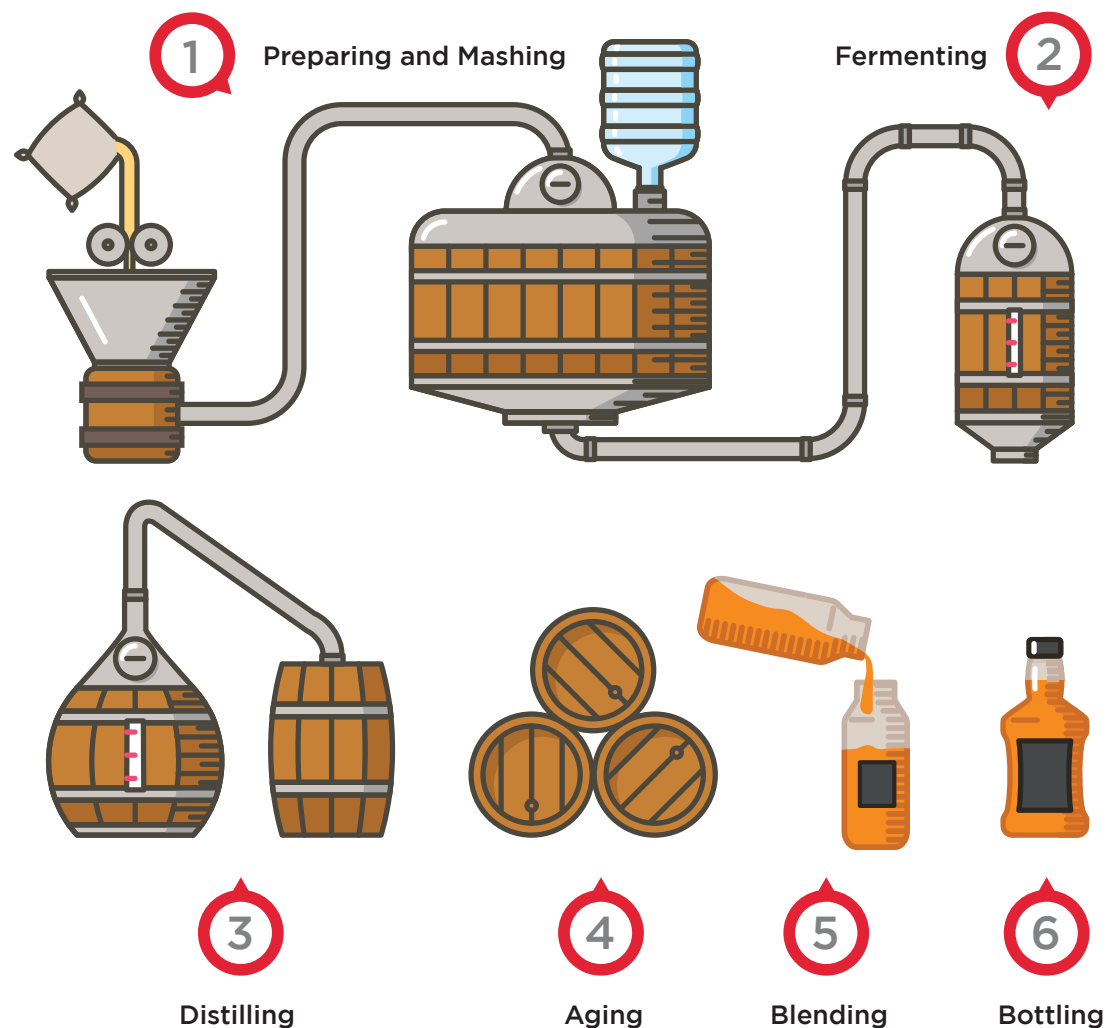
¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/458652/number-of-distilleries-by-region-canada/>

how are spirits made?

When asked 'so, how are spirits produced?,' Vicki Denig at Liquor.com responded:

In short, via distillation. Distillation is what sets spirits apart from beer, wine, and other styles of non-distilled alcohol. Alcoholic beverages can basically be broken down into two categories: fermented (or non-distilled) beverages and fermented (distilled) beverages. Fermented beverages that do not undergo a distillation process include beer, hard cider, mead, saké and wine. Alcohol that's fermented and distilled includes brandy, gin, rum, vodka, and whiskey.

Spirit making is a multi-step process that differs slightly depending on the type of alcohol being made.²



Learn more about each step of the process here: <https://www.liquor.com/how-spirits-are-made-5184058>



² <https://www.liquor.com/how-spirits-are-made-5184058>



Brewing vs. Distilling

When speaking about alcoholic beverage production, there can be confusion between brewing and distilling, and the roles of Brewers and Distillers. Brewing involves making alcoholic beverages – like beer, wine and hard cider from grains, fruits, and vegetables. Distilling involves taking fermented beverages, like beer and wine, and separating out the alcohol from them.³ Both Brewers and the Distillers have extensive knowledge of their respective crafts; however, the Distiller – at the end of the distilling process – will have produced spirits such as whisky, vodka, rum, and brandy.

Distilling Education

Distilling and spirit making, much like brewing and winemaking, is a blend of passion, science, and art. As Canadian spirit production continues to grow, post-secondary education in distilling is becoming more recognized and expected within the industry.

At the time of publication, the following post-secondary programs exist in Canada:

Niagara College Canada: Artisan Distilling

As a Distiller, you have in-depth understanding of the scientific, technological, and business aspects of distilling and fermentation combined with relevant skills and knowledge in product production, testing and merchandising.

Career Opportunities: Agency sales representative; distillation manager; distillation technician; distiller for small-to-large volume distillery; export licensee; operations manager; product developer; quality control inspector/supervisor

Learn more about the program at: <https://www.niagaracollege.ca/winebeerspirits/program/artisan-distilling/>



³ <https://cedarstoneindustry.com/brewery-vs-distillery-whats-the-difference/#:~:text=Brewing%20is%20the%20process%20of,to%20produce%20a%20quality%20product.>

Olds College of Agriculture and Technology
- Craft Distilling

This program provides applicable and necessary hands-on training and is committed to the promotion of sustainable production practices. Specific areas of instruction include fermentation theory and application, maturation and blending of spirits, sensory evaluation, and quality assurance and management in a distillery environment.

This five month program consists of four online courses, each four weeks long, finishing with a capstone 5-day blended field study and concurrent online class. The program runs from the beginning of May to the end of September.



Learn more about the programs at: <https://www.oldscollege.ca/programs/continuing-education/service-industry-food-production/craft-distilling.html>



career pathway for distillers

A COMMON CAREER PATHWAY FOR DISTILLERS CAN INCLUDE:

Distillery Worker / Labourer

Distillery Worker/Labourer is an entry-level position that provides an individual with an introduction to the spirit making industry and the distillery. Workers/Labourers may be involved in material handling, cleaning, packaging, and other supportive activities related to the spirit making process. This position serves as an excellent education on what is involved in spirit making and can help an individual to decide if they would like to pursue distilling as a career.

Skill Level: Foundational Skill (FS)

Educational Requirements: No prior experience or training in a distillery; high school diploma or equivalent may be required/preferred; training is provided on-the-job.

Related NOC Code: **NOC 95106**

- Labourers in food and beverage processing

Career progression from a Distillery Worker to specialized spirit-making roles typically requires post-secondary education/training.



Assistant Distiller / Distilling Technician

Assistant Distillers (known in some operations as Distilling Technicians) work under the supervision of Distillers. They are responsible for assisting with the manufacturing, storage, bottling, labelling, and packaging of distilled products. They also play important roles in cleaning and sanitation of the distilling plant area and may also participate in sample collection, analysis, and evaluation. Assistant Distillers may also lead tours of the distillery to visiting guests.

Skill Level: High Skill (H)

Educational/Experience Requirements:

Post-secondary training in distilling is often required; minimum 4 years experience in a distillery (in positions related to the spirit making process) is required if the individual has not completed formal education.

Related NOC Code: **NOC 94140** – Process control and machine operators, food and beverage processing

Distiller

Distillers are responsible for overseeing the spirit making process from preparation through to bottling. They often provide direction supervision to Assistant Distillers, who are less experienced in the spirit making process and provide mentorship and guidance to the next generation of Distillers. They play a central and critical role in the overall business of the distillery, combining their understanding of processes with the creative spirit of distilling, for product development and innovation. The scope of the Distiller role varies depending on the size and type of the distillery. For example, Distillers working in small-scale, artisan distilleries often wear many hats and are involved in almost all operations. In larger distilleries, a Distiller may be focused on one product or process, allowing them to become an expert in their specific area.

Skill Level: Supervisory Skill Level (H)

Educational/Experience Requirements: Post-secondary training in distilling is typically required; minimum 2 years experience as an Assistant Distiller often precedes the promotion to Distiller.

Related NOC Code: **NOC 94140** – Process control and machine operators, food and beverage processing

Blender/Mingler

Blenders/Minglers are specialized, skilled Distillers that have an amazing nose and palette (aka sense of smell and taste) that allows them to blend products – by combining barrels and batches – to create signature spirits. In many operations, this role is assumed by the Lead/Head Distiller; however, in larger operations, this may be a position that is dedicated to new batches and blends.

Skill Level: High Skill Level (H)

Educational/Experience Requirements: Post-secondary training in distilling is typically required; minimum 2 years experience as Distiller – and a talent for tasting and blending – often precedes the promotion to Blender/Mingler.

Related NOC Code: **NOC 92012** – Supervisors, food and beverage processing

Lead/Head Distiller

Typically employed by larger distilleries, Lead Distillers are the most experienced Distillers in the production process and play a role in the personnel management of the production team (e.g., distillery workers, assistant distillers and in some cases, other distillers). This role involves additional ‘people management’ skills and is a blend of production and human resource management. They may be involved in personnel hiring, scheduling, discipline, and training.

Skill Level: Supervisory Skill Level (S)

Educational/Experience Requirements: Post-secondary training in distilling is typically required; typically, 1-2 years experience as a Distiller often precedes the promotion to Lead/Head Distiller. Additional training in personnel management is a strong asset and may be required by some employers.

Related NOC Code: **NOC 92012** – Supervisors, food and beverage processing



Master Distiller

Master Distillers have the responsibility for managing the distillery's production team and take pride and ownership of the quality and craftsmanship of the products being produced. They oversee all aspects of the production, from sourcing raw materials through to bottling. They are recognized for their skill in the art and science of distilling and play a key role in developing and testing new products; designing and implementing quality control, sampling and planning programs; and developing and implementing specifications, processes and procedures. They often work closely with scientific/quality control personnel, sales and marketing, logistics and warehousing departments. The role of Master Distiller is a career goal for many Distillers and is a recognized and valued role in the industry.

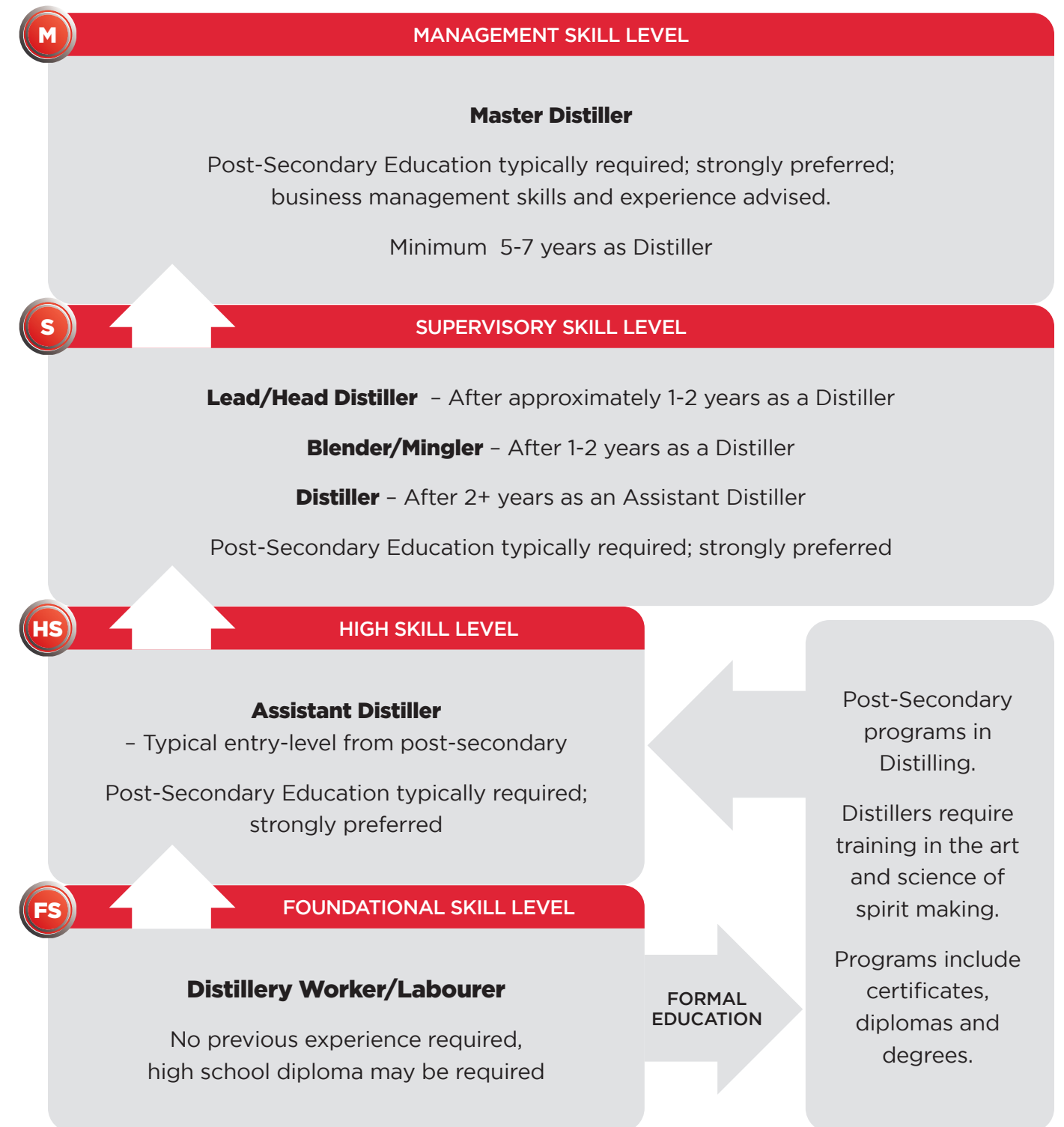
Skill Level: Management Skill Level (M)

Educational/Experience Requirements: Post-secondary training in distilling is typically required; minimum 5-7 years experience as Distiller often precedes the promotion to Master Distiller at a distillery. Additional training in management and business operations is a strong asset.

Related NOC Code: **NOC 90010** – Manufacturing managers



distiller career pathway





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