

GLOBAL DISABILITY AWARENESS

TRENDS, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS
FROM FOOD & BEVERAGE LEADERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





ABOUT US

Food Processing Skills Canada (FPSC) is Canada's workforce development organization for the food and beverage manufacturing sector. For more than 28 years, FPSC has worked alongside industry, government and education partners to build a skilled, future-ready workforce that strengthens Canada's food safety and security, drives economic growth, and positions the country as a global leader in the food economy.

From business owners and executives to managers, supervisors, frontline employees, students and jobseekers, FPSC delivers workforce solutions that help businesses grow and people succeed.

Through flagship initiatives including Skills Training Across Canada, FoodAbility, Canadian Food Processors Institute, Food Skills Library, and Canada's leading Labour Market Information, FPSC is building a high-performing, future-ready food and beverage manufacturing workforce.

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Food Processing Skills Canada (FPSC) is formally known as Food Processing HR Council (FPHRC)

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A WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITY CANADA CANNOT AFFORD TO OVERLOOK



Canada's food and beverage manufacturing sector is the country's largest manufacturing industry, yet it continues to face a sustained workforce challenge. Recent research from Food Processing Skills Canada (FPSC) reveals that the sector employed approximately 317,000 people in 2025 and is expected to require 173,800 new hires between 2026 and 2034, or about 19,200, annually to replace retirements and meet growth.

At the same time, more than 800,000 Canadians with functional limitations are unemployed despite having employment potential, and the employment-rate gap between people with and without functional limitations remains almost 20 percentage points. These realities point to a significant and underused Canadian talent pool.

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FPSC's *Global Disability Awareness Report* examines global trends, leading practices and practical solutions that can help Canadian employers, governments, employment serving organizations and training providers move from awareness to action. Through a systematic review of peer-reviewed research, government and international sources, and publicly available sustainability reports of leading Global Fortune 500 food and beverage companies over the past decade, FPSC has summarized broad evidence into guidance for Canada.

The *Global Disability Awareness Report* also includes company case studies prepared and assembled by FPSC to show how ability-focused workforce strategies are being applied in real organizations. Examples from McCain Foods, PepsiCo, Nestlé, JBS Brazil, MOD Pizza and Purdys Chocolatier demonstrate that inclusion is not an abstract policy goal. It can be embedded into recruitment, training, workplace culture, leadership, product design and customer experience in practical, scalable ways.

ABILITY-FOCUSED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IS THE SOLUTION

The strongest conclusion from the research is that ability-focused workforce development should be treated as a talent, productivity and competitiveness strategy. Companies that excel in disability inclusion have reported 28% higher revenue, 30% higher economic profit margins and twice the net income of their peers. These results reflect the broader organizational benefits of inclusive workplaces: stronger problem-solving, improved employee loyalty, lower turnover, better workplace design and closer alignment with diverse consumer market.

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The business case is especially relevant for Canadian food and beverage manufacturers. The sector continues to face high turnover, recruitment challenges and a growing need for people across several occupations. Ability-focused hiring expands the number of qualified candidates considered for these roles without lowering standards. It shifts attention away from conventional proxies such as uninterrupted employment histories or formal credentials and toward a candidate's demonstrated skills, strengths and capacity to perform essential job functions.

The report also reframes the language of inclusion. FPSC uses “ability-focused workforce strategy” to centre the conversation on what people can do, “functional limitation” to identify supports without allowing a limitation to define a person, and “workplace adjustment” as a practical, less stigmatizing way to discuss accommodations while recognizing that legal accommodation terminology remains necessary. This language supports a more constructive business conversation focused on capability, performance and mutual benefit.

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WHAT LEADING CANADIAN FOOD AND BEVERAGE EMPLOYERS ARE DOING

FPSC's research and case studies show that effective inclusion is not achieved through hiring alone. Leading organizations integrate ability-focused practices across the full employee experience and connect them to broader business priorities.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Employers use targeted outreach, accessible job descriptions, skills-based assessments, practical work trials and interview formats that recognize different communication needs.

UNIVERSAL WORKPLACES AND TECHNOLOGY

Leading companies improve physical accessibility, provide sensory-friendly environments, make workplace adjustment requests easy to navigate and adopt digital accessibility standards such as WCAG.

ONBOARDING AND TRAINING

Successful programs include individualized planning, phased onboarding, visual and plain-language instructions, job coaching, mentoring and regular check-ins.

CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Senior leaders visibly champion ability-focused hiring, boards and leadership councils oversee progress, managers receive practical training, and employee resource groups create connection, feedback and accountability.

RETENTION AND CAREER GROWTH

Employees are given access to professional development, accessible learning materials, clear advancement pathways, adaptive tools and flexible work arrangements where appropriate.

PRODUCT AND CUSTOMER INNOVATION

Universal design is increasingly applied to products, packaging, digital platforms and customer service, opening access to a large and loyal consumer market.

COMPANY EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATES CREDIBILITY AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The FPSC-developed case studies provide tangible examples of these practices.



MOD Pizza combines community partnerships, accessible interviews, gradual onboarding and practical supports.



McCain Foods demonstrates how psychological safety, equal opportunity and workplace adjustments can be embedded into culture.



JBS Brazil operates a Training and Inclusion Center focused on skills development and employability.



Nestlé's THRIVE network combines employee advocacy, education and manager training.



PepsiCo's Achieving Change Together initiative trained more than 900 managers and supported over 2,600 jobseekers with disabilities.



Purdys Chocolatier shows how co-design with people with sight loss can produce accessible packaging, strong market demand and visible proof that inclusive values shape business decisions.

PERSISTENT BARRIERS REQUIRE COORDINATED SOLUTIONS

Despite strong evidence and comprehensive Canadian legal frameworks, progress remains uneven. The report identifies four interconnected barriers: persistent stigma and misconceptions about capability; employer knowledge gaps, especially among small and medium-sized businesses; inaccessible physical, digital and communication environments; and fragmented support systems that do not always understand industry roles, production realities or employer expectations.

Employee experience also remains a concern. Employees with disabilities report lower engagement and belonging, are more likely to feel their careers have stalled and often believe their ideas are overlooked. These findings reinforce that recruitment targets alone are insufficient. Employers must create conditions in which people can contribute, develop and advance.

A stylized illustration in shades of purple and blue. It features a globe with latitude and longitude lines, partially obscured by several interlocking gears of different sizes. Green leaves are also integrated into the design, creating a complex, organic-looking pattern.

25% of employees with physical or mental disabilities report a sense of belonging in the workplace, compared to 39% of employees without disabilities.

57% of employees with disabilities are more likely to feel their careers are stalled compared to 44% for non-disabled employees.

Digital transformation creates both risk and opportunity. Inaccessible HR platforms, workplace software and production systems can create new barriers, while automation may disproportionately affect routine and entry-level roles. At the same time, assistive technologies, speech recognition, text-based communication, eye-tracking tools and AI-enabled accessibility can expand independence and participation. The policy and business challenge is to ensure that technology is designed and implemented inclusively from the outset rather than retrofitted later.



PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR EACH STAKEHOLDER

FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGE BUSINESSES

Employers should begin with practical changes that strengthen the entire workforce: review job descriptions for unnecessary barriers; introduce skills-based assessment and accessible interviewing; establish a clear workplace adjustment process; train leaders, HR teams, supervisors and employees; audit physical and digital accessibility; create measurable goals; and track recruitment, retention, engagement and advancement outcomes. Universal design should be considered in facilities, technology, training, products and packaging. Smaller businesses do not need a large formal program to start. They can appoint an internal champion, build relationships with specialized employment organizations and focus first on one role, department or facility

FOR GOVERNMENTS AND DECISION MAKERS

The report calls for a coordinated ability-focused workforce strategy that treats Canadians with functional limitations as an essential part of the national labour force. Priorities include clearer guidance under existing accessibility frameworks; financial incentives and practical supports for employers; investment in accessible transportation, technology and vocational training; better disaggregated labour-market data; and transparent evaluation of publicly funded employment programs. Policy and program design should follow the “Nothing Without Us” principle by meaningfully involving people with disabilities in design, implementation and evaluation.

FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Employment serving organizations have a critical role in connecting talent to real industry demand. To be effective partners, they must understand food and beverage occupations, production environments, food safety expectations, shift work and the essential functions of specific jobs. Services should address both sides of the employment relationship by preparing jobseekers with sector skills, workplace readiness and coaching, while also helping employers redesign recruitment, onboarding and supervision practices. Success should be measured not only by placements, but also by retention, employee progression and employer satisfaction.

FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Education and training providers should integrate accessibility, universal design, respectful communication and the business case for inclusion into culinary, hospitality, food science, manufacturing and business programs. Accessible paid work-integrated learning, apprenticeships and internships can provide direct pathways into employment. Partnerships with employer-driven organizations such as FPSC can reduce duplication, improve alignment with current competency requirements and connect training more directly to employers with active workforce needs.

THE PATH FORWARD

Canada has the legal foundation, social infrastructure and industry leadership required to become a global leader in ability-focused workforce development. What is still needed is a practical, coordinated approach that connects employer needs, jobseeker preparation, workplace design and public policy.

FPSC's research makes the opportunity clear. A large Canadian talent pool remains underused while the food and beverage sector urgently needs new hires. Employers that act early can improve talent access, retention, productivity, innovation and consumer connection. Governments can strengthen labour force participation while reducing pressure on social supports. Employment serving organizations and training providers can create more direct, sustainable pathways from skills development to lasting careers.

Food Processing Skills Canada, through its FoodAbility program, sector expertise, labour market research and employer partnerships, will continue to lead

this critical work. The next step is not further recognition of the problem, it is coordinated implementation turning evidence, proven company practices and practical tools into workplaces where more people can contribute and succeed.

By embracing ability-focused workforce strategies, we can ensure that the food and beverage manufacturing industry, and the broader Canadian economy, benefits from the talents and contributions of all Canadians.

To read the full Global Disability Awareness Report including the case studies and policy recommendations visit:

fpsc-ctac.com/reports/





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