Quality Technicians Benefit from Lab Skills Training

The goal of sending employees to the Dairy Quality Assurance Food Lab Skills training offered by College of Sequoias (COS) Center for Applied Competitive Technologies (CACT) was to enhance quality control according to Sharee Harms, Quality Assurance Manager, Saputo Cheese USA (www.saputo.com). “Saputo wanted to improve lab technicians’ skills by giving them a better background in math and microbiology so they would understand the theory behind their work,” said Harms. “Increasing their technical skills will enable them to more effectively assure product quality.”

Through the Tulare County Advanced Manufacturing Committee, employers identified a mutual need for food lab skills training. The college developed a customized course that responded to the businesses’ requirements. The Workforce Investment Board (WIB) of Tulare County provided ETP funding to off-set the cost of training.

Harms met with instructor Renee Thornburg to describe her company’s needs and select the curricula. Then Thornburg developed customized lesson plans for the six session course that covered basic math, microbiology and quality control. During the class, Thornburg reviewed US Department of Agriculture Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) requirements. Participants also learned quality procedures and record keeping as well as physical and chemical testing methods.

“I appreciated that the instructor modified the course content based on the skills and needs of the students,” said Harms. “For instance, employees needed more emphasis on math skills so additional material was added.” (Continued on page 2)

Manufacturers Pilot Skills Certification

Five manufacturers are participating in a pilot to prepare employees to be certified through the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC - www.msscusa.org).

Topics include:
- Safety
- Quality Practices & Measurement
- Manufacturing Production & Processes
- Maintenance Awareness

The members of the Tulare Advanced Manufacturing Committee:
- International Paper-Exeter
- Saputo Cheese USA
- Provisions Food Co.
- JM Eagle™
- Warren & Baerg Manufacturing Inc.

All are testing the MSSC certification program.
Employees from several manufacturing companies recently participated in Frontline Supervisory Training explained instructor Heather Bixler. “The goal was to train participants to think like supervisors and develop behaviors that bring out the best in their teams,” said Bixler.

To introduce and review concepts, Bixler uses videos, case studies and activities with deeper meanings, all related to the manufacturing environment. “Participants say that they can relate to the manufacturing case study scenarios and have used their new skills in work situations,” said Bixler. The course covers communication, human relations, conflict management, problem solving, decision making and strategic planning.

Bixler has been training employees and teaching college classes since 1998. She worked in several management positions and brings many real examples into the class. She holds a B.A. and M.A. in Communication.

Participants say: “I learned a lot and I’m actually using it at work,” “I gained self-awareness,” “I learned how to deal with different situations and work effectively with diverse people,” and “Now, I know how to think like a manager.”

Through the Advanced Manufacturing Committee, employees from five companies participated. The Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County subsidized the cost of training with Employment Training Funds and College of the Sequoias delivered the 27 hour course over nine weeks.

According to Louann Waldner, COS CACT Director, response from industry partners has been very positive. “The content has been tested with multiple employers and we received excellent feedback,” said Waldner. “We’ve run two sessions and another is planned for this fall. Clients say that productivity improves when supervisors hone their skills.”

To learn more about Frontline Supervisory Training, contact Louann Waldner at 559-737-4884 or louannw@cos.edu.