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Food + Workforce:

Connecting Growth and Good Jobs for NYC's Emerging Specialty Food Manufacturing Sector

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Evergreen is a membership organization that champions manufacturing, creative production, and industrial service businesses in North Brooklyn and beyond. We connect businesses with resources and opportunities to help companies create and maintain high quality jobs at all skill levels. For more information about Evergreen's programs, please visit www.evergreenexchange.org.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City has always been a city known for its diverse and innovative food culture. In recent years, a growing, eclectic mix of artisanal food and beverage manufacturers is bolstering this reputation, creating new products ranging from cocktail mixers to vegan cupcakes to handmade salsas. There are always new and exciting products on the shelves of local specialty stores, and regular events celebrating local food. In fact, between 2009 and 2013, 1,294 food and beverage manufacturers opened for business in the five boroughs.¹ Many of these companies are now approaching the 3 to 5 year age range, a critical time for business growth and expansion, and are facing numerous challenges as they look to scale up.

This study seeks to understand the specific workforce opportunities created by the growing specialty food and beverage manufacturing sector and identifies strategies to ensure these opportunities remain accessible to a diverse population and that businesses have the resources they need to thrive in New York City. This study focuses on the emerging specialty food and beverage sector, companies that are producing high-quality products, often incorporating artisanal and natural ingredients.

The study's research is grounded in a survey of 45 small, specialty food and beverage manufacturers and dozens of in-depth interviews with manufacturers, workforce organizations and industry stakeholders. Specifically, we found that the emerging specialty food sector is:

- Largely comprised of companies 3-5 years old, a critical time for companies attempting to scale up in the face of a myriad of challenges to growing a manufacturing business in New York City.
- Less diverse than the overall food and beverage manufacturing sector.
- Generally optimistic about their growth potential in New York City.
- Expecting to double employment within three years, and will increasingly prioritize English skills for new hires.
- Increasingly facing difficulty finding new employees as the owners' personal networks are no longer meeting their growth requirements.
- Not adequately connected to NYC's large workforce development infrastructure despite the sector's need to find new, qualified employees.

To address these barriers and capitalize on the opportunities of this vibrant sector we recommend city agencies, the city's Industrial Business Service Providers and local workforce organizations work together to:

1. Promote a diverse workforce by forging relationships between workforce providers and food and beverage manufacturers.
2. Create policies and programs to help companies grow past the critical 3-5 year stage so they can scale up and provide quality employment.

¹ National Establishment Time-Series Database (NETS)