

The Cargill Master Series

Who are the people behind Cargill's innovative ingredients, beverages and food? Here's an inside look at the experts who work every day researching ingredients and developing recipes, beverages and foods that feed the world.



Q&A with Christine Gianella Addington

Senior Technical Services Specialist, Dairy at Cargill



Christine Gianella Addington, a Senior Technical Services Specialist at Cargill, is a Georgia native. She grew up as the oldest of two sisters in Marietta, Georgia (an Atlanta suburb). She studied nutrition and food science at Georgia Southern University, then received her Master's of Science, Food Science and Technology at the University of Georgia. Addington relocated to Denver, Colorado, in 2013, when she landed her first post-graduate job in cheese product development at Leprino Foods. In 2016, she began working at Dean Foods as a Senior Innovation Scientist, and was there for more than a year before getting recruited to work at Cargill in September 2017. We caught up with her in Denver, where both she and her husband work out of home offices.

How did you get interested in food and beverage?

My dad had us trying new foods all the time growing up. I remember eating alligator tail when I was five years old. That's where my curiosity about food started. Then I became interested in nutrition and the science of food through playing sports. I started in gymnastics, played basketball in the church leagues, then moved on to the traveling teams, and when I was in high school, I played varsity. I sat on the bench most of the time, but I enjoyed being part of a team.

Do you think being on a sports team has helped you professionally?

Yes. I learned that it's not one individual who creates success; it's the whole team. I learned about leadership – understanding the behaviors that create a leader. Being sensitive to each person on the team in order to motivate them. How to be a good listener. How to understand what drives the team and what the overall goals are. Playing a sport also helped me with time management. I learned to juggle practice, games, schoolwork, and also a part-time job.

What was your part-time job?

I worked at a restaurant. I wanted to buy a car when I turned 16, so I started babysitting really young; when I was old enough, I became a hostess and server, saving up enough money to buy a 1998 Honda Civic.

How did you end up at Cargill?

In graduate school, I studied blueberries and somehow fell into the dairy industry. I was recommended for a job in dairy at Leprino Foods, where I was able to build relationships and help solve problems. Then I went to Dean Foods, where I got exposure to a lot of different products and how those products were processed, but had less direct contact with customers, which I missed. A recruiter approached me to work at Cargill, and that's how I ended up here. In my job now, I go to a customer's facility, help formulate their new products and recommend ingredients I think would work well for their development and their formulation. I travel about 50 percent of the time and work from home the rest of the time, so it's a great balance.

Any funny food snafus to share?

At an earlier job, we were running a late-night trial at a factory, and one of the workers forgot to add rennet to the process to help the cheese coagulate. All of a sudden, 10,000 pounds of soft cheese was flying out of every pipe.

What's interesting about your work now?

I'm learning from some of the best people in the industry. There are a lot of experts in the group I'm with now who've been in the industry a long time and know everything about the product. To me, Cargill doesn't seem internally competitive. People share information freely and support each other for the benefit of our customers. If I have a question about anything, people immediately jump in to help me out. It's so much more efficient to work this way.

“People share information freely and support each other for the benefit of our customers.”

Any exciting goals on your personal bucket list?

Our biggest goal, especially while we don't have kids, is to get out and see as many countries and places as possible. Obviously, I can't do that all at once. We save money so we can travel. I try to take an international trip every year. I would love to learn about every country if I could.

Is that why you minored in Spanish?

Yes, I studied abroad in Spain as an undergrad. I've always had a huge interest in traveling and international cultures. I think it's important to get out and experience new things. When I first got into the industry, I handled a lot of our Latin American accounts, so knowing Spanish came in handy.

What's the coolest place you've traveled to?

Morocco, in 2009. I took the ferry over from Spain. It was such a different culture than I'd seen before. But I also went to Japan three years ago. That was cool too.

Where will you go next?

Asia. We will fly into Hong Kong, go to Taiwan and finish in Vietnam. We are specifically going to Taiwan for the street food. Most of our trips are spent trying new restaurants, trying new bars, trying the street food. Food – really getting to know the flavors – is a great way to truly experience another culture. I'll have to bring my stretchy pants on that trip.