



Growing Talent in Virginia's Restaurant and Food Service Industry

How large is the restaurant industry in America? There are over a million locations serving millions of customers each day — with \$799 billion dollars in sales and employing 14.7 million people, or 10 percent of the national workforce. Let's take a closer look at Virginia.

The restaurant and food service industry is growing in Virginia. In 2017, 367,800 jobs, or nine percent of employment in Virginia, was in the restaurant and foodservice industry.

The future looks bright...

...for those interested in joining this growing industry. For many, the excitement of the industry begins at the high school level, and the National Restaurant Association (NRA) knows that. In 1987, the NRA created the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation (NRAEF). The NRAEF was formed to help promote the industry's service to education, community engagement, and career opportunities.

The NRAEF has a strong focus on educating the future workforce of the industry through its ProStart Program. ProStart is a national two-year curriculum for high school students. With over 1,700 high schools participating in 50 states, the ProStart curriculum gives students interested in the restaurant industry an advantage as they look at entering post-secondary education, the workforce, or both. Each state restaurant association works with schools within their state to help grow the program. In Virginia, 55 schools are using the ProStart curriculum. The students learn everything from knife skills and safe food handling to management principles.



The ProStart Student Invitational

Each year, participating Virginia schools are given the opportunity to compete in the Virginia ProStart Student Invitational (VPSI). The competition gives the students a taste of what it's like to work in the industry and an opportunity to showcase the skills they've learned. This year, VPSI will be held at The National in Leesburg, VA on March 9.

The student teams participating...

... in the culinary portion of the competition have 60 minutes to prepare a three-course meal. The meal is then presented to judges, who are industry professionals. In addition, students can also compete in a management portion of the competition. Management teams present a restaurant concept — complete with menu design, costing, restaurant layout, and marketing. The winners of both the culinary and management competitions will move on to a national competition to compete with the winners from other states. Winners from both the state and national competitions can receive scholarship money that will help fund their future education.

Whether the students are just graduating or currently in the workforce, they can expect to find growth opportunities. By 2027, the number of jobs in Virginia's restaurant and foodservice industry is expected to grow by 37,900 jobs, bringing the total to 405,700, for an increase of

10.3 percent. [The numbers in this article were provided by the National Restaurant Association.]

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