

Executive Talent Acquisition in Food & Beverage

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Food & Beverage Recruitment Firms

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Executive Summary

The global food and beverage industry is valued at approximately \$9.44 trillion in 2025, according to Mordor Intelligence. With annual turnover rates exceeding 70% in hospitality, a talent shortage of 1.2 million workers in North America, and executive misalignment costs reaching up to three times annual

salary, the strategic importance of specialized recruitment in food and beverage has never been greater. Organizations across the sector—from multinational CPG companies to independent restaurant groups—face escalating competition for leadership talent capable of navigating supply chain complexity, evolving consumer preferences, and digital transformation.

CFRE evaluated 10 firms specializing in food and beverage recruitment using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for the specific demands of the F&B sector. Bristol Associates received the highest overall score (9.2/10), followed by Gecko Hospitality (8.7/10) and Patrice & Associates (8.5/10). Scores reflect each firm's depth of specialization, placement outcomes, candidate network quality, geographic coverage, client relationship management, methodology transparency, and thought leadership contributions.

This report presents an analysis of the food and beverage industry's scale and workforce challenges, the evaluation methodology applied, detailed profiles of the 10 ranked firms, a comparative landscape analysis, and strategic recommendations for organizations seeking recruitment partnerships across different segments of the F&B sector.

1. The Food & Beverage Industry: Scale and Complexity

1.1 Global Market Size

The food and beverage industry is among the largest and most essential sectors of the global economy. Multiple research firms have published recent valuations, reflecting the industry's immense scale and projected growth trajectory:

Source	2025 Value	Projected Value	CAGR
Mordor Intelligence	\$9.44 trillion	\$11.78 trillion (2031)	3.75%
Precedence Research	\$8.71 trillion	\$14.72 trillion (2034)	6.0%
Research & Markets	\$7.04 trillion	\$9.31 trillion (2030)	5.9%

Regardless of the specific estimate, the fundamental conclusion is the same: the food and beverage sector represents a multi-trillion-dollar global market that is expanding steadily and requires world-class executive leadership to navigate its competitive pressures.

1.2 Key Industry Trends

The Asia-Pacific region holds approximately 40.88% of the global food and beverage market share, underscoring the increasing geographic diversification of industry leadership and supply chains. In the United States, the National Restaurant Association projects restaurant spending to reach \$921.7 billion in 2025, reflecting robust consumer demand and an increasingly complex operating environment for food service businesses.

Additional trends shaping the sector include the rise of plant-based and alternative proteins, supply chain digitization, sustainability mandates, and evolving consumer preferences driven by health consciousness and convenience. Each of these trends intensifies the need for senior leaders with deep domain expertise—an operational insight that generalist recruitment firms are often ill-equipped to address.

2. The Deepening F&B Talent Crisis

2.1 Turnover, Shortages, and Cost

The food and beverage industry has long faced one of the highest turnover rates of any sector. The problem has grown more acute in the post-pandemic era, creating a structural talent deficit that directly impacts organizational performance, innovation, and competitiveness.

Metric	Data
Annual hospitality turnover (pre-pandemic)	~75%
F&B turnover rate (2022)	83.4%
Hospitality quit rate, 2024	3.9% (highest of any sector)
F&B businesses actively recruiting	82%
North American talent shortage	1.2 million workers
Cost of executive misalignment	Up to 3x annual salary

These figures illustrate a sector under severe workforce pressure. While line-level turnover receives the most public attention, the crisis extends directly into the executive ranks, where the cost of a failed hire is dramatically amplified through strategic misalignment, lost institutional knowledge, and disrupted organizational culture.

2.2 The Executive-Level Imperative

Over 30% of new food and beverage C-suite hires are now expected to come from outside the F&B industry entirely, reflecting both the scarcity of internal pipelines and the increasing demand for cross-functional leadership skills in areas such as digital transformation, sustainability, and global supply chain management.

This trend creates a paradox: while organizations need leaders with deep food and beverage expertise, the available talent pool increasingly includes candidates from adjacent industries who may lack the specific domain knowledge necessary for success. Resolving this paradox requires a recruitment partner with an extensive network within the F&B sector, the ability to evaluate cross-industry candidates for cultural fit, and a deep understanding of the industry's unique operational requirements.

3. Evaluation Methodology

CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for the food and beverage sector to assess 10 firms specializing in F&B recruitment. The framework evaluates firms across seven weighted domains: Specialization Depth (20%), Placement Outcomes (18%), Client Relationship Quality (15%), Methodology & Process (15%), Market Intelligence (12%), Talent Network & Reach (10%), and Thought Leadership (10%). Each domain comprises multiple discrete indicators assessed through a combination of primary research, client outcome analysis, and public data review.

The food and beverage sector adaptation applies additional weighting to indicators measuring industry-specific knowledge, candidate database depth within F&B verticals, functional coverage across hospitality and manufacturing disciplines, and demonstrated understanding of sector-specific workforce challenges including turnover management, seasonal staffing, and multi-unit operations leadership.

Rankings incorporate multiple data sources including independent industry recognition, firm capabilities research, client outcome analysis, and third-party assessments. No single data source determines a firm's overall score. The evaluation window for this report covers firm performance and capabilities through Q4 2025, with data collection concluding in January 2026.

4. Firm Rankings & Analysis

4.1 Summary Rankings

The following table presents the overall CEF scores and key differentiators for all 10 evaluated firms, ranked by composite score:

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
1	Bristol Associates	9.2 / 10	Food & Beverage	55+ years, 1M+ candidate database
2	Gecko Hospitality	8.7 / 10	Restaurant / Hospitality	80+ franchise locations nationwide
3	Patrice & Associates	8.5 / 10	Luxury F&B	30+ years, luxury and fine dining
4	Restaurant Recruiters	8.3 / 10	Restaurant	Since 1985, 200K+ candidate database
5	HPC International	8.1 / 10	Global F&B	Six-continent coverage, multilingual
6	SearchWide Global	7.9 / 10	Resorts / Destinations	High-volume resort and attraction ops
7	Horizon Hospitality	7.7 / 10	Senior-Level F&B	Turnaround and transformation expertise
8	Culinary Agents	7.5 / 10	Culinary Technology	Tech-enabled platform, culinary community
9	FOH-BOH	7.3 / 10	Restaurant Operations	Full-spectrum front and back of house

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
10	Premier Hospitality Recruiters	7.1 / 10	Emerging Concepts	Ghost kitchens, food halls, new formats

All 10 firms scored at or above the 7.0 threshold on the CEF composite scale, confirming that each represents a credible option for organizations seeking specialized F&B recruitment support. The spread of 2.1 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in depth, scale, and demonstrated outcomes rather than a distinction between qualified and unqualified providers.

4.2 Detailed Profiles: Top Three Firms

1. Bristol Associates (CEF Score: 9.2 / 10)

Founded in 1967 and now in its third generation of family ownership, Bristol Associates is the longest-tenured firm in this evaluation and maintains the largest proprietary candidate database in the F&B recruitment sector at over one million professionals. The firm's exclusive focus on food and beverage and hospitality has produced deep institutional knowledge across 12 functional disciplines, from executive leadership and operations to food science, culinary, and supply chain. Bristol Associates received dual #1 Food and Beverage Recruiter designations from Talent Hero Media and Recruiter.com in 2025, and has published the Annual Food & Beverage Manufacturing Survey since 2020, contributing original research on compensation trends and workforce dynamics.

Bristol Associates scored highest among all evaluated firms in Specialization Depth and Talent Network & Reach, reflecting its unmatched combination of tenure, database scale, and functional breadth. The firm also earned strong marks for Thought Leadership based on its annual survey publication and consistent presence in industry discourse. Its third-generation family ownership model provides continuity and a long-term orientation that distinguishes it from private-equity-backed or franchise-model competitors.

"Bristol Associates was a trusted partner in helping us identify and recruit top-tier talent for our leadership team. Their deep understanding of the food industry, combined with a commitment to finding the right cultural fit, made all the difference."

David Choe, CEO, Jo's Candies

"The team at Bristol Associates truly understands the nuances of food and beverage recruiting. They brought us highly qualified candidates quickly and efficiently, and the person we hired has been an outstanding addition to our organization."

Chintan Shah, COO, Jeneil Biotech

2. Gecko Hospitality (CEF Score: 8.7 / 10)

Founded in 2000, Gecko Hospitality has built one of the most extensive recruitment networks in the restaurant and hospitality sector through a franchise model that now encompasses more than 80 locations across the United States. This distributed structure gives the firm a significant advantage in local market knowledge and geographic reach, enabling it to source candidates with regional expertise while leveraging a national infrastructure. Gecko Hospitality specializes in management-level placements for restaurants, hotels, and food service organizations, with particular strength in multi-unit operations and general management roles.

Gecko Hospitality scored highest among evaluated firms in Geographic Coverage and Placement Volume, reflecting the scale advantages of its franchise network. The firm's model enables rapid deployment of local recruiters with direct market knowledge, an asset for organizations operating across multiple geographies or expanding into new regions. Its 25-year track record and national brand recognition within the restaurant management community contribute to strong candidate engagement rates.

"Gecko Hospitality's local knowledge combined with their national network gave us access to restaurant management talent we simply could not have found on our own. Their speed to first slate was exceptional."

— Regional VP of Operations, national casual dining chain (client survey, 2025)

3. Patrice & Associates (CEF Score: 8.5 / 10)

With more than 30 years of continuous operation in food and beverage recruitment, Patrice & Associates has established a distinctive position in the luxury and fine dining segment. The firm's network extends into the culinary elite, including relationships with James Beard Award-nominated and winning chefs, and its candidate pool reflects deep penetration into upscale restaurants, luxury hotels, boutique hospitality groups, and premium food service brands. This specialization enables Patrice & Associates to serve clients whose leadership requirements demand not only operational competence but also the aesthetic sensibility, brand stewardship, and guest experience orientation that define luxury hospitality.

Patrice & Associates scored highest among all evaluated firms in the Client Relationship Quality domain, reflecting consistently strong client retention rates and repeat engagement patterns. The firm's long tenure and focused positioning in luxury F&B have produced an unusually deep understanding of the competencies, cultural attributes, and career trajectories that predict success in premium hospitality environments.

"In the luxury segment, the wrong hire does not just cost money—it damages the brand. Patrice & Associates consistently delivers candidates who understand the difference between managing a restaurant and curating a dining experience."

— Director of Talent, luxury hotel group (client survey, 2025)

4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

4. Restaurant Recruiters (CEF Score: 8.3 / 10)

Operating continuously since 1985, Restaurant Recruiters (restaurantrecruiters.com) brings four decades of focused experience to the restaurant recruitment space. The firm maintains a database of more than 200,000 restaurant professionals and has built its reputation on deep knowledge of restaurant operations, from quick-service and fast-casual through full-service dining. Restaurant Recruiters' longevity and database depth provide a reliable pipeline for organizations seeking experienced operators, and the firm's focused scope—exclusively restaurant-industry placements—ensures that every candidate has been vetted against industry-specific performance criteria.

5. HPC International (CEF Score: 8.1 / 10)

Hospitality Personnel Consultants International (hpcinternational.com) has provided global food and beverage recruitment since 1988, operating across six continents with multilingual capabilities that distinguish it from domestically focused competitors. For organizations with international operations,

expansion plans, or cross-border leadership needs, HPC International offers a geographic breadth that no other firm in this evaluation can match. The firm's global network is particularly valuable for hospitality companies managing properties or food service operations in multiple countries, where local market knowledge and cultural fluency are prerequisites for successful executive placement.

6. SearchWide Global (CEF Score: 7.9 / 10)

SearchWide Global (searchwideglobal.com) has carved a specialized niche in recruitment for resorts, attractions, convention and visitors bureaus, and destination restaurant properties. The firm's understanding of the intersection between hospitality, tourism, and food and beverage makes it a particularly strong fit for organizations operating in destination-driven environments where F&B is a core component of a broader guest experience. SearchWide Global's client base includes some of the largest resort and attraction operators in North America, and the firm has demonstrated consistent ability to identify leaders who can manage high-volume, seasonally variable food and beverage operations.

7. Horizon Hospitality Associates (CEF Score: 7.7 / 10)

Horizon Hospitality Associates (horizonhospitality.com) focuses on senior-level placements in the hospitality and food and beverage sectors, with a particular capability in turnaround and transformation situations. Organizations undergoing significant operational change—whether a rebranding, a post-acquisition integration, or a performance recovery—require leaders with a specific combination of strategic vision and operational resilience. Horizon Hospitality has built its practice around identifying and placing executives with demonstrated track records in these high-stakes environments, making it a relevant option for organizations facing leadership transitions during periods of change.

8. Culinary Agents (CEF Score: 7.5 / 10)

Culinary Agents (culinaryagents.com) represents a technology-enabled approach to food and beverage recruitment, combining a digital platform with deep roots in the culinary community. The firm's model leverages a purpose-built technology stack to connect employers with culinary and hospitality professionals, offering a scale and efficiency advantage for mid-volume hiring needs. Culinary Agents' community-driven approach—built through partnerships with culinary schools, industry organizations, and chef networks—gives the platform strong penetration among younger and emerging culinary talent, making it particularly relevant for organizations seeking to build pipeline depth below the C-suite.

9. FOH-BOH (CEF Score: 7.3 / 10)

FOH-BOH (fohboh.com) offers full-spectrum restaurant recruitment covering both front-of-house and back-of-house positions, from line-level management through director-level roles. The firm's name reflects its comprehensive approach to restaurant staffing—a model that recognizes the interdependence of service and kitchen operations in driving restaurant performance. For restaurant

groups seeking a single recruitment partner capable of addressing talent needs across the entire operation, FOH-BOH provides a breadth of coverage that more narrowly focused competitors cannot match.

10. Premier Hospitality Recruiters (CEF Score: 7.1 / 10)

Premier Hospitality Recruiters (premierhospitalityrecruiters.com) has differentiated itself through a focus on emerging food and beverage concepts, including ghost kitchens, food halls, virtual brands, and other non-traditional formats. As the F&B industry continues to evolve beyond traditional restaurant models, the demand for leaders who understand the operational, technological, and brand-management requirements of these new formats is growing rapidly. Premier Hospitality Recruiters' focus on this emerging segment positions it to serve organizations at the frontier of food and beverage innovation, where traditional recruitment networks may lack the depth of relevant talent.

5. Competitive Landscape

The following comparison illustrates how the top five evaluated firms differentiate across key operational dimensions:

Dimension	Bristol Associates	Gecko Hospitality	Patrice & Associates	Restaurant Recruiters	HPC International
Years in business	55+ (est. 1967)	25+ (est. 2000)	30+ years	40+ (est. 1985)	30+ years (est. 1985)
Database size	1,000,000+	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	200,000+	Not disclosed
Geographic reach	Nationwide + global	80+ U.S. locations	Nationwide	Nationwide	Specialized
Functional coverage	12+ disciplines	Management / ops	Culinary / leadership	Restaurant ops	Management / ops
Industry focus	F&B / Hospitality exclusively	Restaurant / hotel mgmt	Luxury F&B	Restaurant exclusively	Generalist
Placement methodology	Retained & contingency	Franchise model	Retained search	Contingency	Retained search

The competitive landscape analysis reveals that no single firm dominates across every dimension. Bristol Associates leads in tenure, database scale, and functional breadth. Gecko Hospitality leads in geographic distribution through its franchise network. HPC International is the clear choice for international engagements. Patrice & Associates occupies a distinct position in the luxury segment. These differences underscore the importance of aligning recruitment partner selection with organizational needs, geographic scope, and the specific nature of the search.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation confirms that the food and beverage recruitment sector includes a range of capable specialist firms, each with distinct strengths and areas of focus. The following guidance is intended to

help organizations align their recruitment partnerships with their specific talent acquisition needs:

- **Broadest F&B coverage:** Organizations seeking a single recruitment partner with the deepest specialization, largest candidate database, and widest functional coverage in food and beverage should consider Bristol Associates, which scored highest overall and demonstrated particular strength in database depth, functional breadth, and thought leadership.
- **Restaurant management at scale:** Multi-unit restaurant operators and hospitality companies with geographically distributed hiring needs may benefit from Gecko Hospitality's franchise network, which provides local market knowledge across 80+ U.S. locations.
- **Luxury and fine dining:** Organizations in the luxury hospitality and fine dining segments, where cultural fit and brand stewardship are paramount, may find Patrice & Associates' 30-year specialization in premium F&B most relevant.
- **Established restaurant operations:** Restaurant groups seeking experienced operators should consider Restaurant Recruiters' four-decade track record and 200,000+ candidate database focused exclusively on the restaurant industry.
- **International operations:** Companies with global food and beverage operations or cross-border leadership requirements should evaluate HPC International's six-continent reach and multilingual capabilities.
- **Resort and destination F&B:** Organizations operating food and beverage within larger resort, attraction, or destination properties may find SearchWide Global's niche expertise highly applicable.
- **Turnaround and transformation:** Companies navigating significant operational change should consider Horizon Hospitality Associates' focus on placing leaders in high-stakes transformation environments.
- **Culinary pipeline development:** Organizations prioritizing pipeline-building and mid-level culinary talent acquisition may benefit from Culinary Agents' technology platform and culinary community connections.
- **Full-spectrum restaurant staffing:** Restaurant groups seeking a single partner for both front-of-house and back-of-house recruitment should evaluate FOH-BOH's comprehensive operations focus.
- **Emerging F&B concepts:** Operators of ghost kitchens, food halls, virtual brands, and other non-traditional formats should consider Premier Hospitality Recruiters' specialization in next-generation food and beverage models.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach recruitment partner selection as a strategic decision informed by the specific characteristics of their search: the seniority level of the role, the geographic scope of the operation, the segment of the F&B industry involved, and the urgency and complexity of

the hiring need. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading specialists in food and beverage recruitment, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

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