

## WAFC



### Business Impact

- Foster emerging leaders
- Fill succession pipeline
- Elevate industry skills level
- Identify core competencies for success
- 470 certificate holders

### Employee Impact

- 44% RMC survey respondents earn associate's degree
- 21% RMC survey respondents earn bachelor's degree + higher
- College credit attainment
- Career/education pathway navigation

### Retail Management Certificate Program

- 10 college courses
- Industry endorsement
- Professional designation
- Use of open source textbooks where possible

# Competency-based Education Fills Talent Development Niche

## Western Association of Food Chains

Retail Food Industry Association creates a competency-based certification in partnership with community colleges that establishes career pathways and develops emerging leaders.

The Western Association of Food Chains (WAFC) is a nonprofit business organization whose board comprises senior executives from the retail and wholesale food industry. The 40-plus companies represented employ over 400,000 workers and account for sales exceeding \$200 billion in 14 western states. Participants include large corporations such as Kroger, Safeway and SuperValu/Albertsons, as well as a number of regional companies and independent stores.

Historically, the retail grocery industry has seen only 14-20 percent of employees attaining postsecondary certificates or degrees, a reality that hampers the sector as the workplace becomes more sophisticated and technologically challenging. Management positions in the grocery industry increasingly require technical skills and use of complex systems to manage millions of dollars in revenue and hundreds of employees. However, the low educational attainment associated with the sector, in part, drives the mistaken perception that the food industry does not provide viable pathways to family-sustaining wages and meaningful careers. Founded in 1921, WAFC's sole mission is to build education depth throughout the food industry.

### Career Pathway & Industry-Endorsed Credential

In order to provide employers with a more educated and high-performing workforce, and to establish a defined career pathway aligned with educational attainment, WAFC established the Retail Management Certificate (RMC) Program, beginning with community college partners in California. Launched in 2000, the program has expanded dramatically in the past decade and is now operational in 135 community colleges in 10 western states at over 150 locations and online. Early research

conducted by an industrial psychologist identified the core competencies required for success in supervisory and management positions within the grocery industry. WAFC and partner companies built upon these to develop learning objectives for the RMC. These competencies received further validation when they subsequently aligned with the Retail Model that was established by the U.S. Department of Labor.

### PERSONAL STORY

Tim Marsh started out like many in the retail food industry - "pushing carts" as a young person. By the end of his second year with Foods Co., a Kroger company, he was a Head Clerk, closing their largest volume store. Now, ten years into a flourishing career, Tim is halfway through the WAFC Retail Management Certificate. His company's support of the certificate and tuition reimbursement program were key motivators in his decision to return to school. Tim knows that much knowledge of the business is gained through experience, but admits that higher education "really shows you how everything ties together." Working full-time, 45 to 54 hours per week, and maintaining a 3.7 GPA, he hopes to become a Store Director and then advance to a district staff position.

Working collaboratively with community college and industry leaders, WAFC "mapped" these competencies and learning objectives to existing course offerings within community college systems. They identified partners willing to modify curriculum to assure specific learning outcomes required to gain the WAFC endorsement were met. One of the strengths of the certificate is the fact that it is, essentially,

pulled from standard academic course work offered by most community colleges. Ten college courses now comprise the RMC certificate program. Employers are able to leverage career advancement interest and more deeply engage participating employees because curriculum content is closely tied to real work experience.

W AFC has worked further with community colleges to make achievement of the RMC achievable for full-time, as well as part-time, employees by assuring that all classes are provided online and in accelerated formats. Upon successful completion individuals receive not only the W AFC certificate, but also a community college certificate and 30 semester/45 quarter credit hours toward an associate's or a bachelor's degree. W AFC strongly encourages the colleges to utilize open source textbooks as well in order to assure free or low cost classroom materials.

## From Incumbent Workers to Emerging Leaders

The retail grocery industry serves as a point of entry into the workforce for a large number of individuals, many beginning their work experience at ages 16 to 18. These entry-level workers often do not pursue higher education for both cultural and situational reasons. However, the industry has a history of promoting from within, offering career opportunities to those sincerely engaged in the various occupations required by this complex sector. At a time when the workplace is becoming more high-tech and key leaders are retiring, it is critical for the industry to encourage educational development among the younger workforce. A recent survey of the RMC graduates indicates that 44 percent of the respondents have also achieved an associate's degree while 21 percent have gone on to a bachelor's and higher.

While W AFC bestows a cash honorarium to RMC recipients, all W AFC companies promote the RMC as valuable and prestigious, and as a pathway to career opportunities. Most offer some type of tuition assistance and recognition for participating. Many of the companies celebrate graduates by holding award ceremonies to recognize certificate attainment and to publicly award monetary bonuses.

**For more information about W AFC, visit [www.wafc.com](http://www.wafc.com)**

**HISTORY:** Since 1921

**W AFC COMPANIES:** 40+ representing 400,000 workers and \$200+ billion sales

Funded, in part, by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

## RMC Considered Essential: Expansion Planned

There is solid understanding among W AFC companies of the value contributed by participating in the RMC. According to Jack H. Brown, CEO, Stater Bros. Supermarkets, a regional grocery chain of 167 stores, "The W AFC RMC plays an important role in the professional development of our Stater Bros. 'family' members. It has made a real difference and gained our strongest support as evidenced in our large number of graduates."

"The W AFC Retail Management Certificate Program is an effective program for developing the foundational business skills that expand employees' capabilities on the job."

— Bruce Everette  
Executive Vice President  
Safeway Inc.

The RMC Program is poised for significant growth among the W AFC companies. This year, W AFC challenged the companies to offer all their qualified employees the opportunity to enroll in one RMC class at an approved college with no out-of-pocket tuition expense to the employee. The challenge is designed to foster greater uptake of the certificate program, by creating broader awareness of the program and overcoming employee resistance based on financial constraints. The challenge has been accepted by many W AFC companies, with one, Stater Bros., offering the opportunity to the first 400 employees who apply.

Total uptake by companies and employees will be confirmed once fall 2011 semester is under way and several data points will be tracked to determine success of the challenge. Building wider penetration within W AFC companies for the RMC will generate a pipeline of workers transitioning from lower-skilled, entry-level positions into emerging leaders. Their elevated competencies will assure a competitive workforce for the retail grocery industry and position individuals on career pathways.



## About Corporate Voices

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we are a unique voice, and provide leading and best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation's economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

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## Find Out More

Corporate Voices is committed to identifying and spotlighting businesses supporting postsecondary completion while making significant contributions to internal company goals. "Best practice" talent development models that increase access to career opportunities through education and training are being examined for characteristics that are transferable and replicable to other employers. This research is being conducted with the guidance of the Corporate Voices Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team consisting of business executives leading promising models and those interested in peer-to-peer learning. If you are interested in joining, contact Peggy Walton at [pwalton@corporatevoices.org](mailto:pwalton@corporatevoices.org). Team members include:

- Verizon Wireless
- Convergys
- Northrop Grumman
- Expeditors
- CVS Caremark
- AOL