

**Fostering Social Justice with the Retail Management Certificate**  
(Cherie Phipps, WAFC's Founding Director of the RMC)

As our nation faces a pandemic, a recession, and now a massive cry for racial justice, our “*essential food industry*” has a key responsibility to ensure that our practices foster economic opportunity and equity for all.

It is imperative that we support programs that catalyze a stronger, more sustainable future for our associates. One program that meets this criteria head-on is the [Retail Management Certificate](#) Program (RMCP), founded under the direction of the Western Association of Food Chains ([www.wafc.com](http://www.wafc.com)).

The food industry's most vital and sustainable resource is people, and people are at the core of WAFC's purposeful mission to “[Advance the food industry through education and leadership.](#)”

According to Mike Hendry, EVP Marketing/Merchandising for Northgate Gonzalez Market, and WAFC's Education Chairman, “Our industry greatly values the RMCP. It is a “game changer” that enables development of our future leaders – particularly those who have not had the opportunity or exposure to post-secondary education. The RMCP's [engaged employer-partners](#) nationwide recognize the critical importance of integrating workforce development into business strategy, and are determined to make this relevant education inclusive and available to all.”

The Retail Management Certificate program can be a powerful and strategic tool to foster social justice:

- First, the highly [relevant 8-course curriculum](#) empowers workers to **acquire critical skills/competencies** that enhance career opportunities, and simultaneously provides college credit that leads to affordable [in-demand degrees](#).
- Next, the program is intentionally delivered through our nation's [community colleges](#) to significantly **increase access to all workers**. Because a H.S. diploma or GED is not required for adults to enroll in the RMCP classes, a conceivably insurmountable barrier to higher education is removed. Time and transportation barriers are removed as the curriculum is available 100% online asynchronously, enabling workers to manage personal lives and access coursework remotely on their own schedule.
- Finally, community colleges are considered to be among the most **affordable higher education** options, thus mitigating the cost barrier that so often is linked to social justice.

The WAFC and our association partner leaders, [FMI](#) and [NGA](#), underscore the issue of cost and urge employers to PRE-PAY the tuition for this vital program. A recent survey conducted by [Strada Education.org](http://StradaEducation.org) confirms the concern over cost. According to survey results, 48% of Americans who are considering pursuing relevant education for career growth are extremely concerned about how they will pay for it.

Pre-payment (as opposed to reimbursement) means workers will have no up-front or out-of-pocket cost. Ninety-four percent of involved employers pre-pay the tuition, and almost every graduate affirmed in a survey that removing this barrier was extremely important. In addition to fully funding tuition, the companies with the greatest utilization of the Retail Management Certificate reward graduates financially by providing a raise or bonus, and some companies have formally linked the credential to promotion.

Engaged leaders across the U.S. invest in the 8-course Retail Management Certificate Program knowing it builds robust talent pipelines, presents accelerated career opportunities for their graduates, and consequently delivers a positive ROI for the graduates and employers.

**To create a more inclusive and equitable future for our industry's workforce, every employer should integrate – and fully fund – relevant education ([www.RetailManagementCertificate.com](http://www.RetailManagementCertificate.com)) to help transform their organization into one that strives for economic viability and provides opportunities for all associates to thrive.**