

Cooking with Purpose: Culinary Workshop with the Alice Waters Institute

University of California Merced

Introduction:

At UC Merced, we believe in the power of food to bring people together and connect us to the land. Our recent collaboration with the Alice Waters Institute was a perfect example of this philosophy in action. From a visit to Burroughs Family Farms to a hands-on culinary workshop, the experience gave our student team members a deeper understanding of seasonal cooking, regenerative agriculture, and the value of learning to cook. It wasn't just about making great food—it was about fostering connections, supporting local farmers, and building a sustainable future for our team and our community.

Essay:

At UC Merced, our partnership with the Alice Waters Institute (AWI) brought a wonderful experience to our team, blending hands-on culinary learning with the principles of sustainability and community connection. The program began with a visit to Burroughs Family Farms, where the transformative impact of regenerative agriculture was shared. This experience grounded our team in the importance of sustainable food systems, highlighting how practices like these contribute to healthier soil, more nutritious food, and stronger communities.

The program continued with a culinary workshop led by AWI Culinary Director Jennifer Sherman. Designed for our student cooks and sous chefs, the workshop emphasized cooking with the seasons and using locally sourced ingredients. Students learned practical techniques while deepening their appreciation for the role food plays in connecting people to the land. The

students were challenged to create original recipes using seasonal ingredients. The top three entries will be featured in our dining centers, giving students a chance to showcase their creativity.

This program wasn't just about cooking—it was about cultivating skills, building confidence, and fostering a sense of pride and connection to food. By supporting our team's growth, we're also investing in a more sustainable, connected future for all.

#### Introduction:

This program, centered around the Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop, was designed to engage and develop our student team and sous chefs. The impact extends beyond skill-building. By fostering mentorship, teamwork, and a deeper understanding of sustainable and local food systems, the program inspires long-term commitment to the dining as a whole. Students leave with practical tools and a strong connection to our organizational mission. A student participant shared, "This workshop gave me hands-on experience and a sense of pride in what we do, knowing it supports the environment and our community." This initiative is a base for talent retention.

#### Essay:

The Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop demonstrates a strong commitment to impact retention by fostering professional development and team engagement among our culinary staff and student team. This hands-on program introduces participants to sustainable and local food practices, helping them develop critical skills while connecting to the broader mission of supporting regenerative agriculture and seasonal cooking. By creating a shared purpose, the program inspires loyalty, pride, and long-term commitment.

This initiative is not a one-time event but a repeatable model with plans for expansion. While this initial workshop focused on our dining student managers and sous chefs, the program's success has spurred plans to include full-time culinary team members. This approach ensures a consistent and comprehensive training pipeline that aligns with industry trends and institutional values, fostering an environment where team members feel supported and valued.

The workshop's replicable structure ensures continued growth for all participants, enhancing skills, and collaboration within the entire team. As we grow this program, the Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop will serve as a core of our strategy to create an engaged, skilled, and inspired culinary workforce, driving retention through investment in their professional growth and connecting them to our local food sourcing goals.

#### Introduction:

The Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop enhances our recruitment efforts by showcasing UC Merced's commitment to supporting local farmers and the Central Valley's agricultural heritage. Situated at the heart of California's agricultural hub, our program highlights the importance of seasonal cooking and regenerative farming practices, correlates with a community where nearly everyone has ties to farming. By offering these workshops that celebrate local produce and connect participants to our mission, we attract individuals passionate about sustainability and community impact. This initiative strengthens our ties to the region but also positions UC Merced as a leader in farm-to-table innovation.

#### Essay:

The Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop will become a vital recruitment tool by linking UC Merced Dining to the visionary work of Chef Alice Waters, a global icon in sustainable and regenerative food practices. This partnership not only highlights our dedication to local agriculture but also reinforces our commitment to meaningful culinary education. Being located in the heart of California's Central Valley, where farming is a way of life, this connects deeply with our community.

Our collaboration with the Alice Waters team has already extended beyond the workshop, with discussions underway for future projects such as an on-campus café and educational center. We've also connected the Institute with local schools and nonprofits to explore bringing an Edible Schoolyard program to the Merced community further deepening our impact. This integration of world-class sustainability principles into our operations makes UC Merced Dining an appealing destination for culinary talent and community-minded individuals alike.

Being associated with Chef Alice Waters' name elevates our dining program's reputation, setting us apart as a forward-thinking leader in farm-to-table menus and environmental stewardship.

#### Introduction:

The Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop has a positive impact on employee satisfaction by fostering pride in the food we serve and the mission we uphold. Through hands-on training in sustainable cooking and the use of local, seasonal ingredients, employees gain a deeper connection to the positive influence their work has on our community. Supporting the local economy and farmers not only strengthens our ties to the region but also instills a sense of purpose in our team. Creating dishes that promote environmental sustainability and enhance student health empowers employees to take pride in their contributions, boosting morale and engagement.

#### Essay:

The Alice Waters Institute Culinary Workshop enhances employee satisfaction by providing meaningful professional development and reinforcing the values that drive UC Merced Dining. Employees who participate gain a sense of purpose and pride in their work as they learn to create dishes that support our local farmers, benefit the environment, and contribute to the health and well-being of our students. This connection between their daily tasks and larger community goals fosters engagement and loyalty.

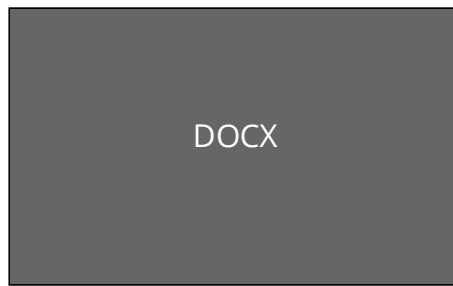
This program empowers employees to become advocates for UC Merced Dining's mission, sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm for sustainable practices beyond campus. As the workshop expands, participants will have opportunities to engage with community programs as educators, teaching seasonal and local food cooking to youth or collaborating with local organizations to promote healthy eating. These experiences not only enhance their professional skills but also deepen their connection to the community.

The pride that employees feel in serving food with a positive impact is amplified by the prestigious association with Chef Alice Waters, a global leader in sustainable cuisine. By investing in programs like this, UC Merced Dining creates a workplace where employees are inspired to advocate for change and take pride in their contributions.

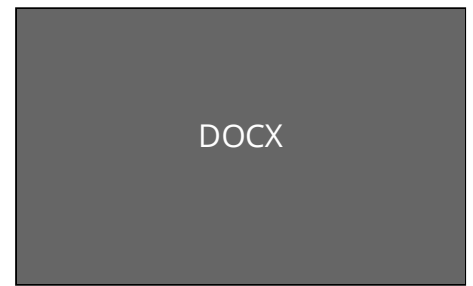
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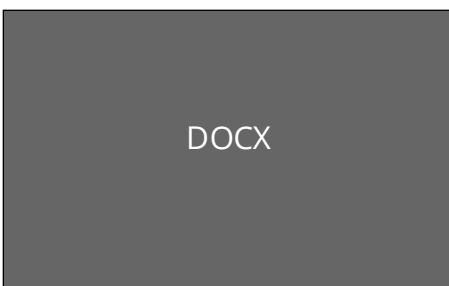
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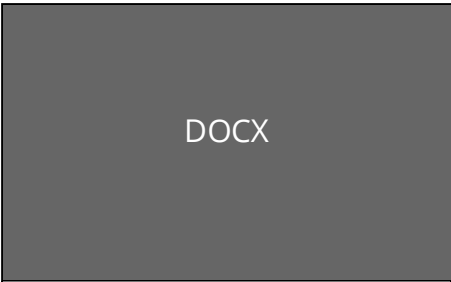


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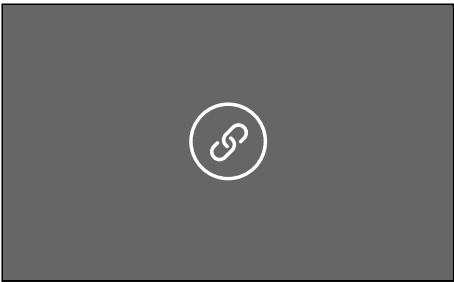
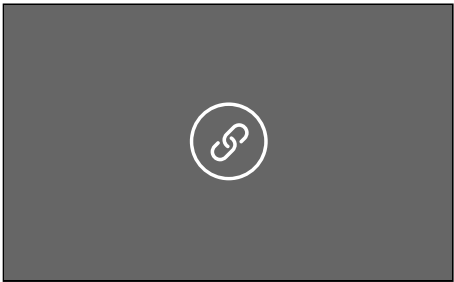
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