



## *The Significance of ACF Certification*

**IN THE 30-PLUS YEARS SINCE ITS LAUNCH IN 1974**, the ACF certification program has been tested, revised, and improved to meet the ever-growing demands and challenges of the foodservice industry. The program has been scrutinized by many national and international agencies to ascertain the integrity of its delivery mechanisms and the validity of its outcomes. Do the cooks and chefs certified by the ACF meet the claims of the program? Are they prepared, at the level they are certified, to meet the prerequisites of the positions they will ultimately fill? Do the foundational subjects of the program remain relevant in the modern industry? Are all the requirements stringent enough to certify only those qualified?

The answer continues to be a resounding yes.



## BUILDING THE ACF CERTIFICATION LADDER

When Chefs Brown, Braun, and Metz formulated the first ACF certification guidelines, they were representing more than 50 years of ACF history. By that time, the ACF membership was well represented in major hotels, restaurants, and clubs around America. This gave the three chefs sufficient direction and guidance, which, coupled with their own experiences, helped them to devise the first formulas for certification.

In the intervening years, the ACF certification process has undergone much debate and review. Indeed, ongoing research, review, and debate are essential to ensure that the ACF certification program remains viable as the industry and the role chefs play in it continue to undergo change. For just as certification validates an individual's background and accomplishments, the world culinary market validates the integrity of ACF certification. This is important, because ACF-certified cooks and chefs are sought after by many American corporations, clubs, private restaurants, and schools. Some organizations even dictate that hiring decisions, promotions, and raises be contingent on obtaining and/or upgrading professional certification. As a result, those who wear ACF insignias have been embraced by the nation's restaurants, hotels, and clubs.

ACF's Certification Program has also been embraced by other countries around the world, an acknowledgment of its well-defined organization and consistent quality of delivery. Chefs in Canada, Mexico, and many Latin American countries have witnessed close-hand the ACF Certification Program and how it has helped to develop and promote professionalism in the industry. They seek to mirror the same pedagogy in their own chef certification programs. In Singapore, Egypt, and Korea, too, chefs have shown an interest in ACF's Certification Program, recognizing the value it brings to the professional life of those in the foodservice and hospitality industry. Like the ACF, these foreign chefs' associations are members of the World Association of Cooks Society (WACS), a global community of cooks and chefs.

It is through ACF's participation in WACS that its certification program has earned worldwide recognition. In particular,

those WACS member organizations that do not have their own certification programs often look to the ACF's when developing or implementing one in their own countries. This cross-culture exchange is possible because although recipe ingredients, flavors, and presentation styles may vary among nations, cooking and baking practices around the world are based on the same fundamentals. Thus, it follows that the skills and knowledge required to be successful cooks and chefs also are similar globally.



## **CLIMBING THE RUNGS OF THE ACF LADDER**

In the past, successful chefs started their apprenticeships at a much earlier age, and performed many more fundamental and parochial duties and tasks than their counterparts today. Some of the world's most famous chefs—for example Antoine Carême, who would one day be called, alternately, the King of Chefs and the Chef of Kings, and Auguste Escoffier, considered the father of modern cuisine—had humble if not dire beginnings. Carême worked day and night, under grueling circumstances, for a famous French baker named Bailly in a *patisserie*, an experience that honed both his skills and his character. Escoffier started his apprenticeship at the age of thirteen under his uncle, who swore he would not show the young Auguste any favoritism. For them, and thousands more like them, hard work, discipline, perseverance, and a propensity for learning proved to be the enduring tools of the trade, which both sharpened their personal skills and eventually led to their professional success.

Though aspiring culinarians today may not face the same hardships, they must deal with a much more complex industry, and as they begin their careers, they may feel lost in the maze of the demands imposed on them; they undoubtedly will feel daunted when comparing their status against the prestige of the executive chefs they will be reporting to and those they have heard and read about. They will need to be assured that their own goal of rising to the top is possible.

To that end, the ACF certification program is designed to follow the natural progression of the culinarian's career from cook

to master chef; as such, it provides an ideal career ladder that foodservice professionals can climb in clearly defined increments. Each level is based on a specific amount of experience and knowledge, which continues to build as they climb to the top. Along the way, it offers both short- and long-term goals to inspire and motivate the aspirant culinarian.

Each step of the ACF certification ladder represents a turning point in a professional cook's or chef's career path. Each is an achievement, indicating that the student has proven his or her skills and knowledge in both the kitchen and the classroom, and therefore is properly trained and motivated to do the job they are asked to perform.

## **First Steps**

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Certified Culinarian (CC) and Pastry Culinarian (CPC) are the first levels of ACF certification. They acknowledge the culinarian who has made his or her commitment to the profession of cooking and baking. A Certified Culinarian has a minimum of three years' full-time experience in cooking and/or baking (for Pastry Culinarian). This person has demonstrated:

- Knowledge in cooking and baking fundamentals, sanitation, food safety, nutrition, nutritional cooking, supervision, and management.
- Solid cooking or baking skills, by performing well in a practical cooking/baking test under the scrutiny of experienced chefs and pastry chefs.

The designations Certified Culinarian and Pastry Culinarian are in and of themselves marks of great achievements and have signaled the beginning of many exciting careers. A Certified Culinarian/Pastry Culinarian is well prepared to succeed at this level and progress to the next.

After a culinarian has worked three or more years in a professional kitchen, he or she is ready to assume greater cooking and station responsibilities—although the size and complexity of the operation will determine the number and type of positions and how quickly promotions can be made. Young culinarians

should aim to gain as wide a variety of experiences as possible in their developing years to give themselves more options as they advance in their careers.

## Stepping Up

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Once a culinarian can prove that he or she can successfully manage multiple and complex tasks, and be responsible for their outcomes, they are typically put in a supervisory role, directing and advising lower-level culinarians such as preparation cooks and assistant line cooks in the performance of related tasks. This marks a major shift in a culinarian's career to supervisor and manager. The experiences gained at this juncture go a long way toward shaping his or her leadership qualities, and so will impact the direction of the culinarian's future.

At this critical level of their development, culinarians can seek to earn designation as a Certified Sous Chef (CSC) or Working Pastry Chef (CWPC). A CSC is someone who has demonstrated the ability to supervise other people in the per-

### **WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

Culinary titles vary from operation to operation: someone may be called a line cook in one operation but a first cook in another. That is why the ACF certification verification process measures levels of responsibilities, not titles, through both written and practical tests.

formance of their duties while managing diverse and integrated procedures themselves. CWPCs have demonstrated the ability to manage multiple baking and pastry tasks; and though they may not supervise other pastry workers their own levels of responsibility for production and quality control become great assets. At this level, each person, in his or her field of expertise, has proven to be competent in a larger set of skills and

knowledge and has crossed the line from worker to supervising manager successfully.

Similarly, each of the succeeding ACF certification levels indicate achievements at increasingly difficult and complex positions. Personal Chef (PCC), Chef de Cuisine (CCC), Executive Chef (CEC), and Executive Pastry Chef (CEPC) certifications each designate individuals with specific training and experiences.

Whether they learned those skills and gained their knowledge through formal or on-the-job training is irrelevant, compared to their comprehension of the subject matter and their ability to apply what they know in practice.

## Top Rung

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The pinnacle to which all culinarians aspire is the highest level of ACF certification: Certified Master Chef (CMC) and Master Pastry Chef (CMPC), which are comparable to other prestigious master chef programs in Europe and Asia. Those designations say, incontrovertibly, that the person displaying either of these insignias has achieved the utmost in professional experience, has gained the highest level of skills and knowledge in all areas of professional foodservice, and has consistently demonstrated a high level of success in all areas of the kitchen. In short, Master Chefs and Master Pastry Chefs are truly masters of their craft.

### RELATIVELY SPEAKING

Chefs can also specialize in various related cooking fields and thus earn “relative” ACF certifications. For example, culinarians entering the private chef industry, those who cook for families in their homes, can earn certification as personal chefs and personal executive chefs (for accumulated years of experience); educators can seek certification for secondary (high schools) and postsecondary experience. In all cases, ACF certification is based on the same foundations of knowledge, progressive skill development, and demonstration of proficiencies.



## WHAT ACF CERTIFICATION MEANS TO THE MARKETPLACE

All those who employ, work with, and are served by ACF-certified individuals are beneficiaries of the ACF certification program.

Certification tells potential employers that applicant chefs and cooks have the knowledge and skill required for the positions for which they are applying. Certification provides profes-

sional cooks and chefs with concrete credentials that can differentiate their applications from dozens if not hundreds of others that cross potential employers' desks.

Certification offers assurance to consumers that the food they order will not only be delicious, but safe as well as prepared to highest quality standards possible. The latter is now more important than ever as concerns about food safety and healthy cooking (diet trends) continue to be on the rise in this country. ACF-certified cooks and chefs have made a commitment to the public to provide the best, safest food possible. Without certification, consumers can only hope for the best; with ACF-certified chefs, they are assured of getting it.

