

## INAUGURAL GRADUATION CEREMONY

### USC Marshall Master's, Food Industry Leadership Program

*Honoring Food Industry Leaders during Challenging Times*

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, November 23, 2020 – The USC Marshall Food Industry Leadership Program graduated its first online cohort on Saturday, November 21, 2020. Cohort 1, aptly named the “Trailblazing XVIII,” consisted of 18 students from a wide range of companies, including Ajinomoto Foods, CloudKitchens, Coca-Cola, Cub Foods, Fairbault Foods, Food 4 Less, General Mills, Oil Dry Corp., Olam Intl., Post Consumer Brands, QFC/Kroger, Raley’s, Rise Baking Co., Smart & Final, Southwest Foodservice, and Whitehall Specialties, Student occupations included a CEO, vice presidents, regional managers, store managers, R & D specialists, food service directors, an executive chef and a food lifestyle writer. The Class of 2020 had a balance of gender, race and ethnic backgrounds, and ranged in age from mid-20s to early 60s, with an average of nearly 20 years of work experience. All 18 completed their classes together and on time, many while working overtime on the front-lines to provide food for their communities during a global pandemic.

“Last year we launched the first and *only* graduate program of its kind in the food industry,” said Dr. Cynthia McCloud, Director of Food Industry Programs at USC Marshall. “We taught online leadership courses in strategy, innovation, decision-making, design thinking, diversity and inclusion, digital marketing, and leadership among others. We engaged some of the most highly sought-after USC faculty who are experts in their areas of research. And we had the great honor of launching this new program with 18 food industry professionals who were willing to take the risks and to help us blaze new trails and experiment with new ways of engaging adult learners.”

McCloud continued: “ Our graduates started as students and finished as *masters* in the food industry. We are thankful to the individual companies who helped support them with education scholarships, and to the Western Association of Food Chains (WAFC) for contributing \$140,000 toward scholarships for this first cohort.”

In a letter to Cohort 2, the Trailblazing XVIII gave the following advice: “*Engage—The more you put in, the more you get out. Remember, this is a journey. Graduation is the end goal, but don’t forget to enjoy the ride. Your cohort is KEY to getting through the program. If you are stuck—as for help. Teamwork and learning to work with others is part of the journey. Stay focused on the marathon, work hard to earn and maintain the trust of your cohort colleagues. Good luck and Fight on!*”

### **About the Food Industry Management Program at USC Marshall**

*The Master of Food Industry Leadership (MS.FIL) program provides tools, concepts, frameworks and critical thinking as well as practical hands-on projects in areas such as new/current technologies, strategic planning and managing change as a senior leader. This 16-month program is designed for working professionals and consists of 30 units taken in a cohort-based learning environment. Classes are taught online with real time discussions and residential weeks at the beginning of the first and last semesters. The MS.FIL program attracts students throughout the United States and focuses on innovative issues that affect global food markets from farm to fork. For more information on the Master of Food Industry Leadership, go to: [www.marshall.usc.edu/fil](http://www.marshall.usc.edu/fil).*

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