



## Tennessee Junior Chef Competition Competition Guidelines

The Tennessee Department of Education School Nutrition Program is hosting the seventh annual **Junior Chef Competition**. Teams will compete to develop a nutritious, student-friendly recipe that includes local foods and is easily incorporated into the school nutrition program. This culinary competition is designed to encourage students to engage with school nutrition and learn about school nutrition programs and Farm to School. In essence, the recipe contest determines the top eight teams to compete in the culinary competition.

### Recipe Contest

In the first round, teams will submit an application, original recipe with nutrient assessment, and an optional photograph of their dish. Applications must be submitted to the Tennessee Department of Education via email to [Lynsey.Paul@tn.gov](mailto:Lynsey.Paul@tn.gov) by **January 17, 2025**. Recipes should be developed by the students, with input and approval from the district's School Nutrition Program.

Recipes will be reviewed and judged on:

- Whether they meet the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern and nutrient standards (described below);
- Incorporation of local ingredients;
- Ease of use by the school nutrition operation;
- Recipe description; and
- Creativity.

**\*Note:** Only one team per school may enter the Recipe Contest. It is recommended that schools conduct a school-level competition among teams to determine the one recipe to submit to the state-wide Recipe Contest.

### Second Round

The submitted recipes will be judged by members of the Office of School Nutrition based on the Recipe Contest Judging Rubric ([available on our website](#)). Based on this round of judging, the top eight finalists from the Recipe Contest will be invited to compete in the Junior Chef competition with a panel of chef judges on March 7, 2025. Based on the cooking demonstrations, recipe presentations, and overall recipe, awards will be given to the top three teams.

There are three award levels: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. Sullivan University in Louisville, KY has graciously sponsored the following scholarships:

- 1st Place: TBD
- 2nd Place: TBD



- 3rd Place: TBD

The first-place team may opt to utilize separate scholarship funds provided by Nashville State Community College instead of the Sullivan University award.

In addition to the scholarship award, the 1st place team will be eligible to compete in the Southeast Regional Junior Chef Competition, to be held at Sullivan University in Louisville, Kentucky, May 8-9, 2025.

**First place teams must make their best effort to participate in the Southeast Regional competition!**

For the Southeast Regional competition, Sullivan University has graciously sponsored the following scholarships:

- 1st Place: TBD
- 2nd Place: TBD
- 3rd Place: TBD

## Teams

- Teams must consist of 2-4 students in grades 9-12. Students must attend a school that participates in the National School Lunch Program.
- Each team must have at least one adult team supervisor that is a school employee. The adult team supervisor will be the primary contact between the Tennessee Department of Education School Nutrition Program and their team. In addition, the adult team supervisor should provide the team with culinary guidance, teach food safety techniques, assist with nutrient assessment, and help meet contest deadlines.
- Teams must obtain approval of their recipe by the school district's School Nutrition Program Director prior to entering the contest. Recipes must be submitted to the school district's School Nutrition Program as soon as possible to allow adequate time for review and approval before the application deadline. This will ensure that recipes meet the USDA meal pattern requirements.

## Application Process

- The completed application (that includes the team's recipe, nutrient assessment, and photograph of the dish) must be submitted electronically to the Tennessee Department of Education by **January 17, 2025**. Entries may be submitted via email to [Lynsey.Paul@tn.gov](mailto:Lynsey.Paul@tn.gov).
- The team must use an original recipe. If the team starts with an existing recipe, the source of the existing recipe must be cited, and teams must alter the recipe to make it their own.
- The team should consider the Junior Chef Recipe Contest Judging Rubric (available on our website) as they develop their recipe.

## Recipe Requirements



- Recipes must meet the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern and nutrient standards. See NSLP Meal Pattern section below.
- The recipe must include 3 components as an entree:
  - 2 oz. meat/meat alternate
  - 2 oz. whole grain-rich food
  - ½ cup vegetable or fruit
- Seasonings should focus on herbs and spices, while keeping sodium (salt) to a minimum.
- Recipes must include two (2) or more Tennessee grown products that are integral to the dish; not a garnish. See the list below of Tennessee grown products. The Tennessee grown products may be used raw or cooked and may be in-season or in a variety of other forms, including frozen, canned, or processed. The Tennessee grown products must be identified in the recipe. Recipes that include more than two Tennessee grown products in the dish will receive one bonus point for each additional Tennessee grown product used for a maximum of five total bonus points.
- Recipes must include one (1) USDA commodity item. Your school nutrition director can help you find this item.
- Nuts are allowable in the Tennessee Junior Chef Competition; however, nuts are not allowed in the Southeast Region Junior Chef Competition. Recipes from the Tennessee competition that contain nuts will need to be revised to be eligible to advance to the Southeast Region Junior Chef Competition.
- The recipe must serve six people.
- The recipe must include all preparation steps and equipment necessary to recreate the dish.
- Recipes must be replicable by school nutrition. During recipe development, student acceptability and the ease of school meal program implementation should be considered (e.g., labor efficiency, number and types of ingredients, number of preparation steps, availability of ingredients to school nutrition, and equipment used in preparation).
- Teams are expected to follow appropriate food safety procedures if using raw meat. For information related to safe minimum cooking temperatures and preventing cross-contamination, please visit [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov). Raw meat may **not** be served for consumption.
- No dessert items are allowed, including, but not limited to, cakes, cookies, pies, candies, ice cream, or brownies.
- Smoothies are not eligible.



## Tennessee Grown Products

### Fruits and Vegetables

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apples</li> <li>• Asparagus</li> <li>• Bok Choy</li> <li>• Beets</li> <li>• Bell Peppers</li> <li>• Blackberries</li> <li>• Blueberries</li> <li>• Broccoli</li> <li>• Cabbage</li> <li>• Cantaloupes</li> <li>• Cauliflower</li> <li>• Carrots</li> <li>• Cherry Tomatoes</li> <li>• Collard Greens</li> <li>• Cucumbers</li> <li>• Eggplant</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garlic</li> <li>• Grapes</li> <li>• Greens</li> <li>• Herbs</li> <li>• Hot Peppers</li> <li>• Kale</li> <li>• Lettuce</li> <li>• Mushrooms</li> <li>• Okra</li> <li>• Onions</li> <li>• Peaches</li> <li>• Pears</li> <li>• Potatoes</li> <li>• Pumpkins</li> <li>• Raspberries</li> <li>• Rhubarb</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snap Beans</li> <li>• Spinach</li> <li>• Sweet Potatoes</li> <li>• Squash</li> <li>• Strawberries</li> <li>• Sweet Corn</li> <li>• Tomatoes</li> <li>• Turnips</li> <li>• Watermelons</li> </ul> |
|---|--|---|

### Meats

- Beef
- Poultry
- Pork
- Fish
- Eggs

## NSLP Meal Pattern Components and Nutrient Standards

- Participants will develop a dish that meets the NSLP Meal Pattern and Nutrient Standards.
- See **Appendix A** for the meal component and nutrient guidelines. Preference will be given to recipes that meet the guidelines.
- Recipes must contain 0 grams *trans* fat\* (unless naturally occurring).
- As soon as possible, your recipe must be submitted to your school district's School Nutrition Program Director to allow adequate time for review and approval of the recipe.

\**Trans* fat: Nutrition label or manufacturers specifications must indicate zero grams of *trans* fat per serving.

## Recipe Contest Judging Criteria

The Recipe Contest will be scored on meeting the NSLP meal pattern and nutrient standards, recipe presentation, creativity, school nutrition reproducibility, and use of Tennessee grown ingredients. After the initial recipe review, teams may be asked to adjust their recipes to meet the meal pattern and nutrient standards.

- **NSLP Meal Pattern and Nutrient Standards:** A nutrient assessment must be completed and submitted with the application. Teams must use a USDA approved nutrient assessment software that may be available from their district's School Nutrition Program, or the recipe analyzer tool included with the application. Teams should use nutrition facts labels when completing the



assessment. If labels are not available, teams may use other sources that provide nutritional information, such as the [USDA Nutrient Database](#). A list of commonly used ingredients is included in the application.

- **Local Foods:** Local foods must be identified in the recipe. Recipes will be judged on the best and most use of Tennessee grown ingredients and highlighting local and seasonal foods.
- **Recipe Presentation:** The recipe will be judged on its description (included in the Recipe Entry Form), completeness, and the photograph of the dish (if submitted).
  - **Description:** Recipe descriptions should cover the taste, texture, and appearance of the dish. It is recommended that you use descriptive words such as colorful, crisp, hearty, spicy, etc.
  - **Completeness:** The recipe should describe the preparation steps and equipment necessary to prepare the dish. The directions should be clear, concise, and complete.
- **Creativity:** Recipes will be judged on innovative use of ingredients, including creative flavor combinations.
- **School Nutrition Reproducibility:** Scoring will take into consideration student acceptability, ease of preparation, number and types of ingredients, availability of ingredients to school nutrition, use of culinary techniques appropriate for use in school nutrition, cooking time, and use of cost-effective ingredients.

## Second Round

Up to eight finalist teams will be selected and asked to participate in the culinary portion of the competition and present their dish to chefs who will judge on March 7, 2025. Teams will be given three minutes to present their recipe.

## Second Round Judging Criteria

The dishes and teams will be evaluated by a panel of judges based on the following criteria:

- **Presentation:** Presentations should be between 2-3 minutes in length and will be scored on thoroughness of dish introduction and ability to answer questions from the judges. During the virtual presentation, teams should:
  - Introduce all members of the team;
  - Describe how the recipe was developed;
  - Describe the nutritional content of the recipe;
  - Identify the local ingredients used in the dish and discuss the importance of buying and using local products; and
  - Describe interaction with the school nutrition program.
- **Overall Appeal:** The dish will be judged on creativity, use of local foods, and school nutrition reproducibility.

See the Junior Chef Recipe Presentation Judging Rubric (available on our website) for precisely how judges



will be scoring your team's recipe presentation during the presentations.

## Awards & Prizes

There will be three awards recognized at the state competition. First place, second place, and third place teams will be awarded scholarship funds to attend Sullivan University. The scholarship awards are as follows:

- First Place: TBD
- Second Place: TBD
- Third Place: TBD

The first-place team may opt to utilize separate scholarship funds provided by Nashville State Community College instead of the Sullivan University award.

First, second, and third place teams will also receive a medal reflecting their placement. The first-place team will receive a traveling trophy that they will get to take back to their district for the duration of their reign as the 2025 Tennessee Junior Chef Champion. The first-place team must return the traveling trophy before the next Tennessee State Junior Chef Competition.

## Contact

Please contact Lynsey Paul at [Lynsey.Paul@tn.gov](mailto:Lynsey.Paul@tn.gov) with questions regarding the competition.

## Appendix A:

### National School Lunch Program Guidelines

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in schools throughout the nation. The program provides reimbursement to schools that meet the federal requirements. The NSLP meal pattern and nutritional standards are based on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Schools must meet requirements to receive reimbursement. Use these guidelines to assist in developing a recipe that meets requirements for school meals.

#### Considerations:

- Schools must meet Daily and Weekly component requirements.
- A component is one of five food groups. The components of a school meal are Grains, Fruit, Vegetable, Meat/Meat Alternate (protein and dairy products), and Milk.
- Recipes must document the amount of each component in the dish.



- For an ingredient to be creditable it must be visible in the final product or be a recipe that is widely known to contain that component.
- Meat/meat alternate and grains are credited in ounce equivalents (oz. eq.) and fruits and vegetables are credited in cups.
- Half of the weekly grains offered must be whole grain-rich (i.e.,  $\geq 50\%$  of the grains in the product are whole grains the remaining 50% or less of grains, if any, must be enriched).
- All food offered counts toward the nutrient requirements; this includes condiments.
- Recipes must contain zero grams of *trans* fat per serving, unless the *trans* fat is naturally occurring.
- Per plate cost includes labor and food cost.
- Schools are tied to specific procurement requirements, so not all ingredients are available to purchase.
- Schools must meet nutrient requirements for calories, sodium, and saturated fat over the course of the week.

#### Meal Component and Nutrient Guidelines by Dish

	<b>Entrée</b>
Components	2 oz. eq. Meat/Meat Alternate 2 oz. eq. Whole Grains ½ cup vegetable or fruit*
Calories	≤ 400
Saturated Fat	< 10% of calories
Sodium	≤580 mg

\*Some fruits and vegetables count differently than the volume used.



### Food Component Requirements

<b>Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in oz. eq.</li> <li>Beef, poultry, pork, beans, nut butters, cheese, yogurt and tofu are all creditable.</li> <li>Use the Food Buying Guide (FBG) to determine how products credit and convert as purchased into edible portion and oz. eq.</li> <li>Access the FBG at <a href="https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fbg">https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fbg</a></li> </ul>
<b>Grain</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in oz. eq.</li> <li>Half of the weekly grains offered must be whole grain-rich (i.e., ≥ 50% of the grains in the product are whole grains the remaining 50% or less of grains, if any, must be enriched).</li> <li>Purchased breads, buns, bagels and biscuits credit 1 oz. by weight = 1 oz. eq.</li> <li>Purchased pasta, rice, and oats credit as 1 oz dry or ½ cup cooked = 1 oz. eq.</li> <li>Flour in from scratch recipes credits 16 g per serving = 1 oz. eq.</li> <li>Cereal grains in from scratch recipes credit 28 g = 1 oz. eq.</li> <li>Use Exhibit A for crediting of other purchased grain products.</li> </ul>
<b>Fruit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in cups</li> <li>Dried fruit credits as double the volume.</li> <li>Minimum creditable amount is 1/8 cup.</li> <li>Use the FBG to convert as purchased into edible portion.</li> </ul>
<b>Vegetable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in cups</li> <li>Weekly vegetable subgroup requirements</li> <li>Minimum creditable amount is 1/8 cup.</li> <li>Raw leafy greens credit as half the volume.</li> <li>Use the FBG to convert as purchased into edible portion.</li> </ul>

### Additional Resources

- USDA National School Lunch Program—[National School Lunch Program | Food and Nutrition Service \(usda.gov\)](#)
- USDA Food Buying Guide—<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fbg>
- USDA Whole Grain Resource for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs — <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/tn-whole-grain-resource.pdf>

Commented [BN1]: [https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fbg](#) is this the link we want to use here? It looks like it's also for the Food Buying Guide, just wanted to double-check

Commented [LP2R1]: Thanks for the catch. i changed it

This program was adapted from the Georgia Department of Education Student Chef Competition.