

2025 DISTRICT 11 4-H FOOD CHALLENGE

Information & Guidelines

FOOD CHALLENGE EVENT INFORMATION

More than 100,000 youth participate in the 4-H Food & Nutrition Project, learning how to prepare nutritious and safe meals and snacks and adopt behaviors that can help reduce their risk for chronic disease. This contest challenges teams of 4-H members to create a dish using only a predetermined set of ingredients. From these ingredients, team members must identify and prepare the dish, then make a presentation about it to the judges.

OBJECTIVES

- Provide opportunities for participants to exhibit their knowledge and skill when preparing and presenting a dish
- Provide opportunities for participants to learn from other team members
- Promote teamwork
- Give participants opportunities for public speaking
- Provide leadership opportunities
- Give 4-H members the opportunity to participate in a new, exciting, competitive event

CONTEST RESOURCES

All Food Challenge Contest resources can be found at [Food & Nutrition - Texas 4-H \(tamu.edu\)](https://tamu.edu/food-nutrition)

PARTICIPATION

Participants must be 4-H members currently enrolled in a Texas 4-H Youth Development County program and actively participating in the Food and Nutrition project.

REGISTRATION

Registration will be completed through 4HOnline 2.0 for each member qualifying for district. Regular registration will be open from October 20 – November 7, 2025. Late registration will be from November 8 – November 17 for an additional \$25.

A Registration fee of \$20 will be accessed through 4H Online.

NOTE:

- All members of the team must be present for Team Registration and Supply Box check-in **at least 20 minutes** before your round. Teams will not be allowed to register if they are not there on time. Teams may also forfeit their spot in the contest if they do not arrive on time.
- Team Supply Boxes will be checked at random

AGE DIVISIONS

Age divisions are determined by a participant's grade level as of August 31 of the current 4-H year in accordance with what is stated in the current Texas 4-H Rules and Guidelines.

For the 2025 District 4-H Food Challenge Contest, there are **THREE AGE DIVISIONS**.

Junior Division: Grades 3 - 5

Intermediate Division: Grades 6 – 8

Senior Division: Grades 9 – 12

QUALIFYING TEAMS PER COUNTY

Each county may enter a maximum of TWO Junior Teams, TWO Intermediate Teams, and a maximum of TWO Senior teams. See Age Divisions above.

MEMBERS PER TEAM

A Team will be made up of at least THREE and no more than FOUR members. (i.e. Juniors and Intermediates may be on the same team, but Junior and Intermediate 4-H members combined to make a team must compete as an Intermediate team. Intermediates will not be allowed to participate on a Senior team.)

SUBSTITUTION OF TEAM MEMBERS

Substitution of team members should be made only if necessary. Only the same number of 4-H members qualifying at the county level will be eligible to participate at the district level. No more than two team members may be substituted, up to the day of the Food Challenge. The substitute 4-H member must have participated in their County Food Challenge or be approved by the County Extension Office to be eligible.

FOOD CATEGORIES

There will be four food categories in each age division: Appetizer, Main Dish, Side Dish, and Healthy Dessert. Teams will be randomly assigned to a category, but assignments will not be announced until check-in the morning of the contest.

- **Appetizer** – Traditionally an appetizer is a small dish or food that is eaten prior to the main course. When selecting recipes for this category, contestants should consider foods that are lower in fat, sodium, and calories so as to not ruin one's appetite.
- **Main Dish** – The main dish is usually the heaviest, heartiest, and most substantial dish in a meal. In a meal consisting of several courses, the main dish is served during the main course and is the featured dish of the meal. The key ingredient is usually meat or another protein food, but they may contain other foods.
- **Side Dish**– Side dishes are foods that are usually served along with a main dish or as accompaniments to the main course. Suggested dishes may include salads, cooked vegetables, cooked fruit, pasta or rice dishes, and/or combination vegetable dishes.
- **Healthy Desserts** – Healthy can still mean delicious when it comes to desserts. Dishes in this category should be served at the end of the meal or for special occasions. Contestants should modify traditional recipes with healthy substitutions and consider MyPlate and Dietary Guidelines when selecting recipes for this category.

ATTIRE

Each team will have the option of wearing coordinated clothing and/or aprons. Team members must wear closed toed shoes and have hair restraints according to Texas 4-H Food Challenge Guidelines.

Hair Restraint: Each team member must wear a hat, hair net and/or other type of hair restraint during the food preparation part of the competition. Examples of acceptable hair restraints include hairnets, bandana with hair completely pulled back, Chef hat with hair restrained inside, or cap with hair completely tucked inside.

RESOURCE MATERIALS PROVIDED AT CONTEST

Resource materials will be provided for each team at the contest. These include:

- MyPlate Mini-Poster
https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/food_nutrition_myplate_mini_poster.pdf
- Functions of Ingredients in Baking, Cooking and Grilling **(NEW)**
https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/food_nutrition_fact_sheet_functions_of_ingredients.pdf
- Fight Bac – Fight Food Borne Bacteria Brochure
https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/national_food_challenge_fight_back_brochure.pdf
- Know Your Nutrients
https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/food_nutrition_know_your_nutrients.pdf
- Food Safety Fact Sheet
https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/food_kitchen_safety_fact_sheet.pdf
- Food Challenge Worksheet
https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/food_challenge_worksheet_2026.pdf

No other resource materials will be allowed. Teams may not use their personal copies of the resources during the contest.

SUPPLY BOX

Each team must supply their own equipment for the challenge. Teams may bring only the supplies listed in the supply box section. Junior and Intermediate Supply boxes **may** be checked in a randomized process by contest officials as teams check in for the contest. Senior Teams Supply boxes will be checked for content using a standard process and any extra equipment will be removed from the team's supply box.

Please refer to the supply list attached and/or posted on page 6 of the Food Challenge Manual at: [Food & Nutrition - Texas 4-H \(tamu.edu\)](#).

Pantry Ingredients-Each team may include in their equipment box the following “pantry” ingredients which they may use when preparing their dish if desired. There is no requirement to use these items, nor is it mandatory that teams include these in their supply box.

- Salt
- Pepper
- Oil (up to 17 oz)
- 1 jar chicken bouillon
- 1 medium onion
- 2 (up to 16 oz) cans vegetables and/or fruit - team choice
- Rice (white or brown) or pasta (up to 16 oz) - team choice
- Cornstarch or flour (up to 1 lb) – team choice
- 3 dried herbs and/or spices (up to 3 oz each) – team choice **(NEW)**

AWARDS

Awards will be presented to first through third place contestants/teams of each category.

PARTICIPANTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any competitor who requires auxiliary aids or special accommodation should contact the District Extension Office at least two weeks before the competition.

ADVANCING TO STATE CONTEST

Depending upon the overall number of entries in the contest, each age division will be divided into random heats of up to six teams with the top 5 placing teams in each heat announced at the awards event. The top four (4) teams overall in the Senior age division will advance to the State 4-H Food Challenge contest. If one of the top teams is not able to participate in the state contest, the fifth-place team will become eligible to participate.

Teams advancing to State will not automatically be assigned the same category as they were at District. At the State contest, Food Challenge will be a Wednesday contest.

RULES OF PLAY

1. General guidelines, resources and instructions will be provided prior to the start of the contest to assist teams.
2. No electronic devices or jewelry (except for medically required) is allowed in the contest. This includes cell phones, smart watches, or any other communication device
3. Each team will be directed to a cooking/preparation station. Contest categories will be revealed at the preparation station.
4. Each team will receive an information sheet with their contest category and “key” ingredient for that category (no ingredient amounts, recipe, or instructions will be provided at the station). The “key” ingredient will be representative of one of the following categories: Appetizer, Main Dish, Side Dish, and Healthy Dessert.

Teams will have access to a “grocery store” of additional ingredients which can be “purchased” and combined with the team’s “key” ingredient to create an original recipe/dish during the contest. The “grocery store” will include items commonly found in grocery stores such as produce, canned goods, crackers, dairy products, etc.

Teams must select & use at least two additional items from the “grocery store” and will be provided with the maximum number of items they can select during orientation.

Teams will not be required to analyze the cost of the recipe, nor will this be included in the presentation or scoring of the contest.

5. Each team will have 40 minutes to prepare the dish, plan a presentation, and clean up the preparation area.
6. Electrical: Junior Teams will not be utilizing electricity in their food preparation at District. Intermediate and Senior Teams should be prepared to **only plug in one piece of equipment at a time** to reduce the risk of electrical malfunction.
7. Preparation:
Each team will create an entire dish/recipe (not a full meal) using the provided key ingredient and grocery store items. Dishes/recipes created should include two or more servings. Teams should present the entire dish/recipe to the judges and communicate during their presentation what an individual serving size should be. Teams will be responsible for determining the number of servings their dish provides. Teams should not

create side or multiple dishes with their ingredients/grocery store items.

- a. Teams are challenged to be creative and develop an original recipe with the ingredients provided.
 - b. Teams will determine the exact amount of each ingredient used based on their original recipe.
 - c. The key ingredient and/or grocery store ingredients selected should be used to garnish the dish.
 - d. Note cards may be used to write down the recipe that the team creates, along with notes related to nutrition, food safety, and cost analysis. Teams should be exact on ingredients used, preparation steps, cooking time, temperature, etc.
8. Food and Equipment Safety: A safe and sanitary working environment must be maintained during the contest. Each station will have food and kitchen safety resources. Teams should follow the steps listed to ensure proper food and equipment safety is followed. Judges will be scoring teams on food and equipment safety during the preparation phase of the contest. Teams should also discuss safety steps used during the presentation phase of the contest.

Gloves do not have to be worn throughout the contest; however, there should always be a barrier between your hand and any food touched. A barrier includes gloves and/or cooking utensils. When wearing gloves, they must be changed between handling raw meats/seafood; handling cooked items; and ready to eat items or raw vegetables to prevent cross contamination.

Hair Restraint: Each team member must wear a hat, hair net and/or other type of hair restraint during the food preparation part of the competition. Examples of acceptable hair restraints include hairnets, bandana with hair completely pulled back, Chef hat with hair restrained inside, or cap with hair completely tucked inside.

9. Nutrition: Each station will have a variety of nutrition resources/references. Each team should highlight key nutrients in their dish and their functions during their presentation.
10. Presentation: Following the preparation phase of the contest, each team will give a 5-minute presentation to a panel of judges. A majority of team members should participate in the presentation.

To earn maximum points, teams must use the 5-minute presentation to address the following areas of the presentation scorecard: Knowledge of MyPlate, Nutrition Knowledge, Food Preparation, Safety Concerns, and Serving Size.

At the end of 5 minutes, time will be called – additional time will not be allowed. Judges will be allowed 3 minutes to ask questions. Judges will not ask questions related to what teams should have covered during the presentation. The Judges questions will be related to general nutrition, health, chronic disease prevention or others relevant to food and nutrition. Following questions, judges will have 3-4 minutes to score/write comments

Please note: Once the 40 minutes of preparation time expires, team members may no longer communicate with each other. Team members may study their notes individually.

11. Clean-up: Teams must clean up their preparation areas. Clean-up time should be included in the 40-minute preparation allotment. Single or double-burner hot plates may be moved to a designated area on the stage until cool.
12. Prepared Dishes: Prepared dishes MAY NOT leave the preparation/judging areas. Dishes must be discarded after teams complete the judging process to ensure teams in following heats do not see what ingredients are available to gain an advantage.