Food Challenge
Contest Memo

Date: Friday, October 30, 2026

Schedule: Will be released after registration closes.

Heat 1 will begin at 9:00 a.m.

Location: Hopkins County Regional Civic Center
1200 Houston Street, Sulphur Springs, TX 75482

Due to space limitations, parents will not be allowed in the building.
We appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

Schedule. A final schedule will be distributed/posted following the registration deadline. The Awards Program for each heat will be conducted as soon as judging and tabulation are complete. More specific times will be sent to the Agents and 4-H Contestants after entries are received.

Registration. Each participating member is required to register in TX4H https://tx4h.tamu.edu/ and pay the $25.00 registration fee. Registration will open on October 5, 2026 and close on October 19, 2026 2026.

Please make sure each team member uses the **exact same team name** when registering. County offices, please double-check and correct any team naming issues at your level before certifying.

Participation. Contestants must be active 4-H members enrolled in a Texas 4-H and Youth Development county program in District IV. Contestants must also be academically eligible (according to UIL rules) to compete on the day of the contest

Academic Eligibility. According to the Texas Education Code, a 4-H member must be deemed "eligible" to compete in an event that takes place on a weekday or weekend. All 4-H youth, including public, private, and/or home school must adhere to the following guidelines regarding extracurricular activities and academic eligibility:

- Complete a "Declaration of Eligibility Form"
  OR
- Name of 4-H member must appear on a list of eligible students to participate in a specific extracurricular activity signed by the school principal or designee.
- Contact your local County Extension Office for the process used by **YOUR** county.
- Eligibility Forms will be returned to and remain in the County Extension Office.

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Age. Age divisions are determined by a participant's grade as of September 1st of the current 4-H year. Age divisions for this contest are: *(Note: the MIXED age division was eliminated in 2016-2017.)*

- Junior (3rd, 4th, & 5th grades)
- Intermediate (6th, 7th, & 8th grades)
- Senior (9th, 10th, 11th, & 12th grades)

Teams Per County. Each county may enter up to 4 teams in each age division. The 1st place senior team from each food category will advance to state. Teams advancing to state will not automatically be assigned to the same food category as they were in at district.

Members per team. Teams must have at least three members but no more than four. Teams **MAY NOT** include members in different age divisions. Each county may enter a maximum of four Junior, four Intermediate, and four Senior teams.

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 and heat. Heat assignment information will be distributed to Agents and emailed to 4-H contestants through 4HOnline.

Attire. Each team will have the option of wearing coordinated clothing or aprons. They must also wear closed toe shoes. No electronic devices or jewelry (except for medically required) is allowed in contest. This includes cell phones, smart watches, or other communication devices.

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.

Jewelry and Artificial Nails: Team members should refrain from wearing any type of jewelry and/or artificial nails during the contest.

Electrical or Equipment Malfunction. Teams that experience any equipment malfunction(s) may not replace the equipment with supplies from another team, leaders, volunteers, county Extension agents or contest officials. Instead, team members must work together and be creative in completing preparation without the malfunctioning equipment.

If electricity goes out during the preparation phase of the contest, teams are asked to contact a contest official IMMEDIATELY. Teams should then turn away from the table. Contest officials will stop the clock for that team so that no preparation time is lost.

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Contest References & Forms. Please refer to the Texas 4-H website Food & Nutrition Project page for contest reference materials, forms, additional rules, and scorecard

2026-2027 Food Challenge Guidelines

Functions of Ingredients and Principles of Food Science in Baking, Cooking, and Grilling

Know Your Nutrients

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2025-2030

Fight BAC!

Kitchen & Food Safety Fact Sheet

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

- Know Your Nutrients
- Food and Kitchen Safety Fact Sheet
- The Science and Function of Ingredients and Cooking
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Fight BAC

Teams should use these resources and their personal knowledge to determine key nutrients in their dish, food, safety, function of ingredients, etc. This information should be utilized ruing the presentation phase of 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. Supply boxes may be checked by contest officials as teams check in for the contest using a standard or randomized process. Any extra equipment will be removed from the team's supply box.

Boxes must be completely closed, and all equipment should remain inside the box until the start of the contest. Supply boxes are limited to the following dimensions: 40" x 24" X 40". If the box is on wheels, the height of the wheels is not included in the dimensions. The contest committee may measure boxes to determine compliance. **Teams with non-compliant boxes may be disqualified.**

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NEW. Large, moving type dollies may not be used to transport boxes. Smaller rolling dollies that can remain under the supply box I the preparation area may be used.

Please make sure all knives are properly and safely packed in the box so that contestants and officials are not injured.

There will be no dish cleaning/washing facilities available. Plan your supply boxes for each team accordingly. Restrooms are off limits for dish/utensil washing. After each heat, burners will be moved to a central table to allow for cooling. Please make sure all burners are clearly labeled with a county, club, or individual's name.

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.

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FOOD CHALLENGE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLY BOX

Each team will bring an equipment box containing only one each of the following items, unless a different quantity is noted. It is not required that all items are included in the box; however, no additional or substitution items are allowed.

Supply boxes are limited to the following dimensions: 40" x 24" X 40". Large, moving type dollies may not be used to transport boxes. Smaller rolling dollies that can remain under the supply box in the preparation area may be used. An empty tub for dirty dishes may be placed on top of equipment box. All other items MUST be contained within the box.

NEW

Bench Scraper
Bowls (up to 4 – any size)
Can Opener
Colander
Cookie Cutters (up to 2 – team choice)
Cutting Boards (up to 4)
Disposable Tasting Spoons (no limit)
Dry Measuring Cups (1 set)
Electric Skillet
Extension Cord (multiple outlet or strip style).
First Aid Kit
Food Thermometer
Fork
Gloves (disposable and food safe)
Grater
Hand Sanitizer
Hot Pads (up to 5)
Kitchen Shears (1 pair)
Kitchen Timer
Knives (up to 6)
Liquid Measuring Cups (up to 2)
Manual Pencil Sharpener
Measuring Spoons (1 set)
Meat Tenderizing Mallet
Note Cards - BLANK (up to 1 package – no larger than 5x7)
Paper Towels (1 roll)
Pancake Turner (up to 2)
Pencils (no limit)
Plastic tub and/or trash bags for dirty equipment
Pot with Lid
Potato Masher
Potato Peeler
Rolling Pin
Sanitizing Wipes (1 container)
Serving Platter or Plate
Serving Bowl
Serving Utensil
Skewers (6 maximum)
Spatulas (up to 2)
Stirring Spoon
Plastic Storage Bags (1 box maximum)
Tongs (up to 2)
Toothpicks (no limit)
Electric Hot Plate (single or double burner)
Whisk
Skillet with Lid

SUPPLY BOX PANTRY ITEMS

The following items should be included in the equipment box and can be used during the contest.
Teams may be asked to remove these items if they advance to the Final Challenge.

- Salt
- Pepper
- 3 Dried Herbs, Spices, or Seasonings (up to 3 oz each – team choice)
- Non-stick Cooking Spray
- Cooking Oil (up to 17 oz)
- 1 Jar of Chicken Bouillon
- 1 Medium Onion
- 2 Can (up to 16 oz each) Vegetables and/or Fruit (team choice)
- Uncooked/Dried Rice or Pasta (up to 16 oz – team choice)
- Cornstarch or Flour (up to 1 lb -team choice)

Texas 4-H Food Challenge 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 contest. This includes cell phones, smart watches, or other communication devices.
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, 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 "purchase" & use at least two additional items from the "grocery store". Teams will receive a pricing sheet for "grocery store" items at their station.

   In each heat, one category per age group will be a **NO COOK** category. For this category, no heat sources will be used and key ingredient will be appropriate for a no cook dish. Adequate grocery store items will be available for both cook and no cook categories.

5. **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.

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e. Each team will have 40 minutes to prepare the dish, plan a presentation, and clean up the preparation area. A 20-minute warning, 10-minute warning, 5-minute warning, and -minute warning will be given. **NO** talking is allowed after the 40 minutes is up.

f. After the 40-minute preparation time is up:

- The team's area MUST be clean, and all the supplies and extra food items must be in their supply box (*except hot burners, see Supply Box*).
- No talking and no writing will be allowed among any team members. Team members caught talking and/or writing will receive a warning. The second time, the team will be disqualified and asked to leave the contest facility.
- Team members should not have pens or pencils in their possession while waiting to give
  their presentation.

NEW. Contest Challenge. SENIOR DIVISION ONLY!

An additional contest challenge will be added during the preparation phase of the contest for **SENIOR DIVISION ONLY.** This will consist of requiring teams to perform a specific task or skill, use an additional key ingredient, use a specific kitchen gadget or kitchen equipment supplied by the contest committee or other related to food preparation. It will be the same for all Senior Teams. During the contest orientation the contestants will be told what their challenge is.

Gloves. 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 utensil. 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.

6. **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.
7. **Nutrition.** Each station will have a variety of nutrition resources/references. Each team should highlight key nutrients in their dish and their functions during theirpresentation.
8. **Presentation.** Following the preparation phase of the contest, each team will move to the presentation phase of the contest. A majority of team members should participate in the presentation.

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Time Limits. Time limits for presentation phase of contest include:

- 5 minutes for a presentation. When time is called additional time will not be allowed.
- 3 minutes for judges' questions
- 4 minutes between team presentations for scoring and comments

NEW. To earn maximum points, teams must use these 5 minutes to address the following areas of the presentation scorecard: ***Food Preparation Principles, Safety Concerns and Practices, Dish and Serving Size Information, Knowledge of Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and Nutrition Knowledge.***

Judges Questions. Judges will not ask questions related to what teams should have covered during the presentation. Judges questions should be related to general nutrition, health, chronic disease prevention or others relevant to food and nutrition.

Awards. Will be presented at the conclusion of each Heat, outside in front of the Civic Center, so parents may watch.

The top two high scoring food challenge teams in each age division from each heat will be recognized with awards during the awards program. In the senior age division, the 1st place team from each food category will qualify for state.

Team Spirit Awards. Team Spirit awards be awarded in each heat in each age division. The Team Spirit award will be given based on teamwork, enthusiasm, and professional appearance. Team Spirit judges will be different than presentation judges. Team Spirit will be evaluated during preparation.

Participants with Disabilities. If you need any type of accommodation to participate in this program or have questions about the physical access provided, please contact Denita Young at djyoung@ag.tamu.edu at least 2 weeks prior to the program or note such needs when registering on TX4H.

Food Allergies. Contestants with food allergies must note their specific allergy at the time of registering on TX4H.

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4-H FOOD CHALLENGE WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to be used to prepare for Food Challenge contests. This worksheet may be utilized as a resource at county, district, or contests; however, will not be used at the state 4-H contest.

Knowledge Of MyPlate		
Ingredient	MyPlate Group	Number of Servings Needed Each Day

Knowledge Of Dietary Guidelines	
Key Message of Dietary Guidelines	How Does This Message Align with Your Dish?

Nutrition Knowledge		
Ingredient & Healthy Substitution	Key Nutrient(s)	Nutrient Function, Benefit, & Deficiency Risks

Food Preparation	
Steps In Preparation	What was Performed in This Step and Why is This Step Important?
Main Ingredient in Dish	What Is the Role of This Main Ingredient?

Food Safety (List Any Food Safety Concerns Associated with The Dish and/or Specific Ingredients)

Serving Size Information	
How Many Total Servings Are in Dish?	What Is the Serving Size for One Person?

Additional Information (List Any Additional Information You Think is Important)

4-H FOOD CHALLENGE SCORECARD: PREPARATION

County: _____ **Team #:** _____

Category: _____ **Appetizer** _____ **Healthy Dessert** _____ **Main Dish** _____ **Side Dish**

Personal Hygiene & Sanitation	**Score**
Examples: Follows proper hygiene practices including appropriate attire, hair restraint, jewelry/nail standards, proper glove and utensil use (as barriers), glove changes, and sanitized work surfaces.	
Score	**___ / 6**
Food Safety Practice	
Examples: Demonstrates Fight BAC! principles through safe food handling, cross-contamination prevention, temperature control, and proper thermometer use (as applicable to category).	
Score	**___ / 10**
Kitchen & Equipment Safety	
Examples: Demonstrates safe knife skills, equipment and electrical safety, safe handling of hot items, and maintains awareness of personal and team safety throughout food preparation.	
Score	**___ / 4**
Food Preparation Skills & Techniques	
Examples: Demonstrates effective preparation techniques, ingredient management, cooking skills, and application of food science principles.	
Score	**___ / 6**
Time & Space Management	
Examples: Maintains an organized workstation, uses space efficiently, manages time effectively, and completes preparation and cleanup within the allotted time.	
Score	**___ / 6**
Teamwork & Collaboration	
Examples: Team communicates effectively, shares responsibilities, involves all members, and works professionally.	
Score	**___ / 8**

Additional Comments:	**Total Score:**	**___ / 40**

Judge 1 _____ **Judge 2** _____ **Judge 3** _____

4-H FOOD CHALLENGE SCORECARD: PRESENTATION

County: _____ **Team #:** _____

Category: _____ **Appetizer** _____ **Healthy Dessert** _____ **Main Dish** _____ **Side Dish**

Food Preparation Principles: ***Included the following: Key steps in how dish was prepared; role and function of main ingredients in dish; knowledge of food science by explanation of cooking processes and food reactions.***	
Score	**___ / 10**
Safety Concerns and Practices: ***Explained Fight BAC! principles relevant to prepared dish including safe food handling, cross-contamination prevention, temperature control, and proper thermometer use (as applicable to category).***	
Score	**___ / 8**
Dish and Serving Size Information: ***Dish is appropriate for assigned category. Demonstrated knowledge of serving size for prepared dish.***	
Score	**___ / 4**
Knowledge of Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA): ***Demonstrated the following: knowledge of DGA key points for healthy living; knowledge of DGA food groups and recommended daily servings by calorie levels.***	
Score	**___ / 10**
Nutrition Knowledge: ***Demonstrated: Knowledge of key nutrients in prepared dish and function of these nutrients, effects on health, and deficiency risks; Knowledge of healthy substitutions and modifications.***	
Score	**___ / 10**
Food Appearance, Quality and Creativity: ***Prepared dish is appealing and appetizing; Appears to be cooked properly; Garnished appropriately; Ingredients are used in a creative manner with grocery store items incorporated into dish.***	
Score	**___ / 6**
Effectiveness of Communication: ***Communication skills are effective; Majority of team members presented; Team was poised and professional in appearance.***	
Score	**____/6**
Judges Questions: ***Questions were answered accurately and appropriately.***	
Score	**____/6**
Additional Comments:	**Total Score:** **___ / 60**

Judge 1 _____ **Judge 2** _____ **Judge 3** _____