



TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE JUNIOR CHEF STATE FAIR CHALLENGE OFFICIAL RULES AND RELEASE FORM

Event: Junior Chef State Fair Challenge

Date: February 9, 2026 through April 17, 2026

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture (“TDA”) is hosting the Junior Chef State Fair Challenge (the “Challenge”), a student recipe contest designed to encourage middle and high school students to showcase creativity, nutrition awareness, and local food knowledge through original, fair-inspired, portable recipe ideas. Students will compete against peers from across the state in a points-based competition.

To participate, please review the Official Rules and complete the Waiver and Release form.

For questions about the Challenge, contact Isabella Griffis at Pick.TN@tn.gov.

Official Rules:

1. **Eligibility:** The Challenge is open to current Tennessee students in grades 6 through 12 who are enrolled in a public, private, or home school program that satisfies curricular requirements toward a high school diploma or its equivalent recognized by the State of Tennessee.

Each student may participate in the Challenge one (1) time per year and may submit only one (1) entry. Entries may be submitted by an individual student or by a team of two (2) students. Team members are not required to attend the same school or reside in the same county.

All entries must be accompanied by a completed digital Waiver and Release Form (see [Junior Chef State Fair Challenge](#) and [Junior Chef State Fair Challenge Team Member #2 Release Form](#)). Students who are under 18 years of age must have the form completed and signed by a parent or legal guardian. For team entries, a completed form is required for each student, including parent or guardian signatures where applicable.

2. **Entries:** No purchase is necessary to enter or win the Challenge.

Entries must be submitted electronically through the official submission platform designated by TDA at https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/junior_chef_state_fair_challenge, and must be received by TDA on or before April 17, 2026.

Each entry must include the following required information and materials:

- a. Student name(s);
- b. Student grade level(s);
- c. Type of school(s) attended (public, private, homeschool, other);
- d. School name(s);
- e. County of school(s);
- f. Confirmation of Tennessee residence;
- g. Home address(es);
- h. Contact information (student if 18 or older; parent or legal guardian if under 18);
- i. Team information;
- j. A complete recipe, including a name, description, ingredients and preparation instructions;
- k. A list of local ingredients and Pick Tennessee Products sourcing information, as required by these Official Rules;

- l. Identification of National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal components included in the recipe;
- m. A completed Recipe Analyzer Tool providing nutrition information per serving, including calories, sodium, and saturated fat;
- n. A photograph of the prepared recipe;
- o. Verification of originality;
- p. Parent/guardian and emergency contact information; and,
- q. A signed and dated parent/guardian permission and release form.

Entries submitted by teams of two (2) students will be evaluated as one (1) entry. If selected as a winning entry, any award provided will be shared equally among the students on the team.

Entries that are incomplete, late, illegible, or otherwise not in compliance with these Official Rules may be disqualified at TDA's sole discretion.

3. **Requirements:** Entries must be original works of the student(s). If two students submit jointly, the division is based on the highest grade level.

Middle School Division (Grades 6-8):

- a. Entries must be clearly inspired by a parfait, defined for purposes of this Challenge as a portable dish consisting of distinct layers of ingredients such as yogurt, fruit, grains (e.g., granola), nuts, seeds, or similar components. The recipe does not need to be a traditional parfait but must visually and conceptually reflect the layered structure and eating experience associated with a parfait.
- b. Entries must include at least one (1) local ingredient sourced from the grand division where the student(s) attend school. If an entry is submitted by two (2) students who attend school in different grand divisions, the students may select one (1) grand division to represent for the purposes of this requirement.
- c. Entries must include a list identifying all recipe ingredients that are sourced from producers enrolled in the Pick Tennessee Products program. For each identified ingredient, students must provide the ingredient name, the producer or product name, and confirmation that the producer or product is listed in the Pick Tennessee Products directory. Students are not required to purchase the ingredients. Sourcing information may be based on publicly available listings from the Pick Tennessee Products website, <https://www.picktnproducts.org/find-products/food-drink/fruits.html>. Accuracy of sourcing information will be evaluated based on the Pick Tennessee Products directory available at the time of judging.
- d. Entries must include at least two (2) full meal components from the National School Lunch Program ("NSLP"), which may include ½ cup fruits, ½ cup vegetables, 2 ounces grains, 2 ounces meat or meat alternatives, or 8 ounces fluid milk. Yogurt qualifies as a meat alternative, with ½ cup of yogurt equal to 1 ounce of meat alternative. Only components meeting the full NSLP quantity requirements will be counted toward this requirement. A list of NSLP meal components is available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards/nslp-meal-pattern#endnote6>.
- e. Each entry must not exceed 700 calories, 1,225 milligrams of sodium, or 18 grams of saturated fat per serving. Students must provide complete nutrition information by submitting the required Recipe Analyzer Tool using data from ingredient nutrition labels or USDA's FoodData Central, available at <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>.

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High School Division (Grades 9-12):

- a. Entries must be inspired by walking tacos, taco bowls, or nachos, defined for purposes of this Challenge as portable, handheld, or bowl-based dishes featuring layered or assembled components commonly associated with these foods, such as grains, proteins, vegetables, sauces, and toppings. Recipes do not need to be traditional but must clearly reflect the flavor profile, structure, and eating experience associated with the selected inspiration.
- b. Entries must include at least two (2) local ingredient sourced from the grand division where the student(s) attend school. If an entry is submitted by two (2) students who attend school in different grand divisions, the students may select one (1) grand division to represent for the purposes of this requirement.
- c. Entries must include a list identifying all recipe ingredients that are sourced from producers enrolled in the Pick Tennessee Products program. For each identified ingredient, students must provide the ingredient name, the producer or product name, and confirmation that the producer or product is listed in the Pick Tennessee Products directory. Students are not required to purchase the ingredients. Sourcing information may be based on publicly available listings from the Pick Tennessee Products website, <https://www.picktnproducts.org/find-products/food-drink/fruits.html>. Accuracy of sourcing information will be evaluated based on the Pick Tennessee Products directory available at the time of judging.
- d. Entries must include at least two (2) full meal components from the National School Lunch Program (“NSLP”), which may include ½ cup fruits, ½ cup vegetables, 2 ounces grains, 2 ounces meat or meat alternatives, or 8 ounces fluid milk. Only components meeting the full NSLP quantity requirements will be counted toward this requirement. A list of NSLP meal components is available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards/nslp-meal-pattern#endnote6>.
- e. Each entry must not exceed 850 calories, 1,280 milligrams of sodium, or 20 grams of saturated fat per serving. Students must provide complete nutrition information by submitting the required Recipe Analyzer Tool using data from ingredient nutrition labels or USDA’s FoodData Central, available at <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>.
- f. If a grain component is included, it must be compliant with Smart Snacks in School standards or sourced from PepsiCo. Information on compliant grain components is available at: <https://www.pepsicoschoolsource.com/brand-list>, <https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/calculator/>, and <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks-school>.

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4. Judging Criteria: All eligible entries will be scored anonymously by a committee selected by the TDA. Each entry will be evaluated using the criteria below, for a maximum total of 100 points.
- a. Adherence to Category Inspiration (maximum of 20 points)
The extent to which the recipe clearly reflects the required category inspiration for the applicable division, including alignment with the defined structure, ingredients, and overall concept associated with the category.
 - b. Creativity and Feasibility (maximum of 20 points)
The originality of the recipe, balance of ingredients and flavors, and practicality of preparation.
 - c. Accuracy of Pick Tennessee Products Sourcing Information (maximum of 10 points)
The accuracy and completeness of information identifying ingredients sourced from producers enrolled in the Pick Tennessee Products program, including correct identification of producers or products listed in the program directory.
 - d. Use of Required Local Ingredients (maximum of 10 points)
The extent to which the recipe meets the required number of local ingredients and demonstrates thoughtful integration of those ingredients into the recipe.
 - e. Compliance with Nutrient Requirements (maximum of 20 points)
The degree to which the entry complies with the applicable calorie, sodium, and saturated fat limits and provides complete and accurate nutrition information using the required Recipe Analyzer Tool.
 - f. Inclusion of NSLP Meal Components (maximum of 20 points)
The inclusion of the required number of full NSLP meal components and accurate identification of those components in the submitted materials.

In the event of a tie, additional points (up to a maximum of 20 points) may be awarded based on inclusion of additional local ingredients beyond the minimum requirement, inclusion of additional full NSLP meal components beyond the minimum requirement, and overall visual aesthetic of the prepared recipe as demonstrated in the submitted photograph.

The TDA committee will not prepare or consume any food item or recipe submitted as part of the Challenge.

All scoring decisions made by the TDA committee are not subject to appeal.

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5. *Winner Selection and Notification:* The Challenge will conclude upon selection of winning entries by the TDA selected committee. All eligible entries will be evaluated in accordance with these Official Rules.

A total of three (3) winning entries will be selected from each division at TDA's sole discretion based on the highest overall scores achieved under the judging criteria. TDA reserves the right to cancel the Challenge, modify the number of winners, or disqualify and re-select winners at any time if an entry is determined to be ineligible or not in compliance with these Official Rules.

Winning students will be notified on or about June 12, 2026, using the contact information provided at the time of entry. If a winning student or, if applicable, the student's parent or guardian cannot be contacted, does not respond within the timeframe specified by TDA, or declines the award, the entry may be disqualified and an alternate winner may be selected.

Selection of winners is not subject to appeal.

The three (3) winning entries in each division will receive an invitation to attend the 2026 Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair occurring August 13, 2026, through August 22, 2026. Each winning entry will be provided with three (3) Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair admission tickets and three (3) meal vouchers to redeem at participating vendors within the Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair. Winning entries will have the option of presenting their winning recipe at the Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair through a brief verbal or slideshow presentation. Each winning student will receive a custom apron. First-place entries in each division will be awarded one trophy per entry and second- and third-place entries in each division will receive medals awarded per entry.

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Waiver and Release

Please read carefully. This is a release of liability and waiver of certain legal rights.

In consideration of being permitted to participate in the Junior Chef State Fair Challenge (the "Challenge"), I, for myself and/or on behalf of my minor child or legal ward, acknowledge, understand, and agree to the following:

1. I acknowledge and agree that participation in the Challenge is voluntary and that I am voluntarily submitting an entry in accordance with the Official Rules.
2. I acknowledge and agree that any award associated with the Challenge is limited to the item(s) expressly described in the Official Rules and that no additional compensation, reimbursement, or consideration will be provided.
3. I agree to release, hold harmless, and indemnify the State of Tennessee, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA), and their respective officers, employees, agents, and representatives from any and all claims, liabilities, losses, damages, or expenses arising out of or related to participation in the Challenge. This includes, but is not limited to, claims asserted by third parties relating to submitted entries; claims related to resources used in developing recipes; and claims for breach of contract, conversion, invasion of privacy or publicity rights, or copyright infringement.
4. By submitting an entry, I agree to be bound by the Official Rules and all decisions of TDA, which are not subject to appeal.
5. I warrant that the submitted entry is original, was created by the student(s), and does not infringe upon the rights of any third party, including copyright, privacy, or confidentiality rights.
6. I consent to the public use of submitted entries and waive any and all rights, including intellectual property rights, royalties, reimbursement, or compensation related to such use. I understand and agree that TDA is not obligated to pay any fees or costs associated with the submission or use of entries.
7. I grant TDA the unrestricted right to reproduce, modify, adapt, publish, distribute, and display submitted entries, including recipes and photographs, in any medium and for any lawful purpose, including educational, promotional, marketing, or commercial use, without compensation. I waive any right to inspect or approve such use.
8. I acknowledge and agree that participation in the Challenge does not create any employment, agency, independent contractor, joint venture, or partnership relationship with the State of Tennessee or TDA.
9. I understand and agree that TDA has no obligation to use, publish, or display any submitted entry.
10. If selected as a winner, I agree to execute any additional media or visual consent forms required by TDA within fifteen (15) days of notification.
11. I understand and agree that TDA is not responsible for transporting participants or their parents, guardians, agents, or representatives to or from any Challenge-related activity, nor for reimbursing any travel or related expenses.
12. I understand and agree that all releases, consents, and provisions contained in this Waiver and Release are irrevocable.

(Digital signatures on [Junior Chef State Fair Challenge](#) and [Junior Chef State Fair Challenge Team Member #2 Release Form](#))



By providing a signature on the official Release Form ([Junior Chef State Fair Challenge](#) and/or [Junior Chef State Fair Challenge Team Member #2 Release Form](#)), I certify that I have read and fully understand this Waiver and Release. I certify that I am at least eighteen (18) years of age and legally authorized to sign this document on behalf of myself and/or my minor child or legal ward, and that I sign voluntarily.