

2026-27

South Carolina Farm to School Junior Chef Competition



Competition Overview

- ☐ Each team may consist of 2-4 students.
- ☐ School teams may consist of any combination of students in grades 9-12th.
- ☐ Each team must have an Adult Team Coach/Supervisor who is present for the duration of the competition. Team Supervisors must be a school employee, parent, chef, or adult representative of a related community organization.
- ☐ Only one (1) team may represent a school.
- ☐ Only students can cook during the competition. The Team Supervisor and/or Coach may only provide hands-off guidance on cooking techniques and safety. Any other adult involvement in cooking will result in disqualification of the team.
- ☐ The center of the plate item must be school lunch “friendly” allowing school nutrition staff to incorporate the recipe into their future menus.
- ☐ Recipe must be universally accepted, be cost effective (\$1.80- \$2.50 for a center of plate item like chicken with vegetables and rice or similar) and able to be scaled to large quantities. Recipe must meet the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern and nutritional standards and contain at least three (3) of the five (5) meal components of the NSLP Meal Pattern: Meat/Meat Alternate, Fruit, Vegetable, Whole Grain, and Milk.
- ☐ A nutritional analysis must be included with the application packet. Teams may use district owned, USDA approved nutritional software such as Meals Plus, Mosaic, Titan, NutriKids, Health-E Pro, the USDA Recipe Analysis Workbook, etc.
- ☐ Entry Fee: There is no entry fee but any travel expenses incurred regarding the

competition will be paid by the entrants.

- Teams must submit a completed application along with the recipe, photo, and nutritional analysis for all items they will be cooking at the competition for review by **October 7, 2026**. All submitted applications will be reviewed and judged. The submitted applications with the highest overall scores will be chosen to compete at a statewide cookoff where each team will have 1.5 hours to prepare their recipe in the timed, in person competition. The statewide finals cook off will be held at the USC Culinary Laboratory Kitchen in Columbia on **October 26, 2026**.

Application Submission

Applications can be submitted using two methods:

1. Email the complete application packet to farm2school@ed.sc.gov.
2. Mail the application packet to:
SC Farm to School Junior Chef Competition
ATTN: Ben Sease
849 Learning Lane
West Columbia, SC 29172

Recipe Criteria

All recipes must:

- Use of at least three (3) local Certified South Carolina Grown ingredients (a representative list will be provided by SCDE: Office of Health and Nutrition Farm to School Junior Chef Team upon request). South Carolina Grown items must be highlighted in red on the application.
- Local ingredients must be integral to the dish and included in the recipe. **Garnish will not count towards one of the three (3) local ingredients.** For example, a dollop of SC produced sour cream on top of chili would count as local. However, chives on top of the sour cream would be considered a garnish. It is great for presentation but would not count as one of your local ingredients.
- Use at least two (2) USDA Foods (commodity food items).
- Be replicable by local school food service staff.
- Be cost effective for NSLP standards. Consult with your Cafeteria Manager or Food Service Director regarding price comparisons.
- Adhere to industry standard Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) / Food Safety Guidelines.
- Be submitted on the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) Office of Health and Nutrition (OHN) provided recipe template (see application).
- Adhere to all SCDE OHN Farm to School Junior Chef Competition rules.
- The recipe must serve six (6) people: Two (2) presentation plates, three (3) judge's plates and one (1) sample plate.

- ☐ Only center of the plate (COP) items (entrees) or COP items with one side are permitted.
- ☐ No desserts are allowed.
- ☐ Dishes may not contain nuts.

Competition Rules

EQUIPMENT

SCDE will provide the following (upon arrival at the competition):

- ☐ ALL Food items requested on the Team's Recipe/shopping list
- ☐ Plates and taste-test serving utensils for judging/presentation
- ☐ Table covers
- ☐ Two (2) Oven mitts for teams using ovens

All teams must bring their own:

- ☐ Food service gloves
- ☐ Any special equipment not typically available in a standard commercial food kitchen necessary to prepare your dish
- ☐ Dish cloths and paper towels
- ☐ A large tub to carry all supplies back to your home base.
- ☐ Written work plan and copies of the recipe in a folder or binder for each of the three (3) judges
- ☐ Closed toe, slip-resistant shoes, solid color collared shirt or polo, black or khaki pants (no denim)
- ☐ Chef jackets and chef hats, if preferred
- ☐ Hair nets which are mandatory
- ☐ Thermometers and timer

Teams may not bring

- ☐ Any electric heating tool including toaster ovens, hot plates, crock pots, electric griddles, microwaves, etc.
- ☐ Plates/utensils for judging presentation. All food entries will be presented on plates provided by the SCDE OHN Farm to School Jr. Chef team.

OVENS—Additional Guidelines

- ☐ Ovens will not be set over 425°
- ☐ Teams may assign one member to be the "Oven Captain". The oven captain will carry the dish to the oven and be the only team member allowed in the

oven area.

- ☐ The ovens are "Community Ovens" - Please allow extra time for your dish to cook as the door may be opened and closed while your dish is cooking.
- ☐ If the oven is shared and the cooking temperatures are different, the team with the lower temperature will use the oven first. The remaining team's allotted 1.5-hour cooking time will be adjusted and will not be counted off.
- ☐ Reminder: **Dishes must be school nutrition appropriate** (i.e., a soufflé would not be practical).

COOKING CRITERIA

This competition challenges teams to create a healthy, delicious, school-food-friendly center of the plate dish using seasonal, local foods. All entries will be judged by the following criteria:

- ☐ Taste – child friendly and flavorful
- ☐ Appearance - presentation on the plate
- ☐ Creativity - ingenuity of ingredients used
- ☐ Best use of local ingredients - highlighting local and seasonal foods
- ☐ School food appropriate - time/cost efficient and nutritionally compliant
- ☐ Cooking time- Each team will have 1.5 hours to complete the dish
- ☐ Clean up time- Each team will have 30 minutes to clean their area

Teams are allowed to practice making their dish prior to the event; however, they may not bring any prepared components of the dish to the competition. Keep in mind that dishes should be suitable for food service time demands. For example, it may not be practical to make tortillas from scratch in a school kitchen, so store-bought tortillas may be used. Similarly, canned green beans may be used.