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ILLINOIS 4-H

**FOOD
CHALLENGE**

2025



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



2025 Illinois 4-H State Food Challenge Details

Who: Youth who have competed 6th grade up to youth who have just graduated 12th grade, in teams of 3-4. Prior Food Challenge participation or 4-H involvement is not required.

What: Timed, judged cooking competition with prizes for everyone! Lunch is provided!

Why: The Food Challenge is fun and exciting and provides important hands-on learning for youth about food safety, preparation, and nutrition.

When: 10am-2:30pm on Saturday, June 14th, 2025

Teams will be assigned a morning or afternoon session and must not arrive before or after their check-in time. If there are not enough teams registered to need two sessions, the event will follow the afternoon schedule.

Where: Macon County Extension Office on Richland Community College's campus

3351 N President Howard Brown Blvd, Decatur, IL 62521

Parking is free! Please enter via the North side of the building.

How: Each participant must register [here](#) by June 6th at midnight. Registration will ask for participants to indicate their team name and adult "coach". All required forms are included in registration.

Event Schedule

Morning Session

9:45-10:00: Check-in time
10:00-10:15: Welcome and orientation
10:15-10:30: Team workstation set up and prep
10:30-11:15: Food Challenge Competition
11:15-12:15: Team presentations to judges
12:15-1:00: Lunch and Awards

Afternoon Session

11:00-11:15: Check-in time
11:15-11:30: Welcome and orientation
11:30-12:15: Lunch
12:15-12:30: Team workstation set up and prep
12:30-1:15: Food Challenge Competition
1:15-2:30: Presentations to judges and Awards

Special thanks to the **Illinois Beef Association** for supporting the
2025 Illinois 4-H Food Challenge.



Funded by Beef Farmers and Ranchers

Illinois Food Challenge Rules and Guidelines

- 1. Eligibility.** Participants must be in middle or high school. Students must be entering 6th grade through just completing 12th grade. Participants do not have to have competed in or won another food challenge to be eligible for participation.
- 2. Team Composition.** Each team will have at least three and no more than four members. There is no limit on how many teams register per unit, county, or school. Alternates can be utilized if a team member is unable to attend the competition. Alternates should register under the team name but note in "other information" that they are an alternate for the team.
- 3. Team "coach".** Each team will be required to bring an adult "coach" with them, such as a parent, teacher, or 4-H staff member. This person will be responsible for assisting and supporting the team on the event day, but may not participate in the actual competition in any way. Coaches do not have to register for the event, but team members will be asked to include their coach's name and contact information in their registration. Coaches will be emailed prior to the event with more information.
- 4. Registration.** Each participant will be required to register for the competition online via Z-Suite by Friday, June 6th at midnight. Participants will be asked to include their team name, coach name, and coach contact information. The first FULL twelve teams to register for the event will be approved to compete. This means that at least 3 team members must be registered for a team to be considered fully registered and eligible to complete. Teams who do not have at least 3 participants registered by the deadline or contest capacity, whichever comes first, will not be able to compete. The registration link is: <https://4h.zsuite.org/event-registrations/39022>
- 5. Participants with disabilities.** Any competitor who requires auxiliary aids or special accommodations must contact the State 4-H office at least two weeks before the competition.
- 6. Guardians and Guests.** Guardians may drop off their child or remain at the event. Guests are welcome to attend. Please notify Natalie Bradley at nbradley@illinois.edu if more than 2 guests will accompany a participant by June 2nd to ensure lunch can be provided for everyone.
- 7. Attire.** Each team member is required to wear closed toe shoes and a hair restraint or cover. Teams may choose to wear coordinated clothing. Aprons and chef hats will be provided to each contestant.
- 8. Electronic devices.** No electronic devices, unless medically required, are allowed during any part of the competition. This includes cell phones, smart watches, or other communication devices.
- 9. Resource materials.** Resource materials will be provided for each team at the contest. These include [MyPlate Mini-Poster](#), [Fight Bac - Fight Food Borne Bacteria Brochure](#), [Nutrition Concepts](#), and [Food Safety Fact Sheet](#). Teams may not use personal copies of these resources or any other resource materials during the contest.
- 10. Event day check-in and orientation.** All team members must arrive to the event during their assigned check-in time and will have their supply boxes checked by event staff. Afternoon teams will not be allowed to observe the morning competition, so they do not have an unfair advantage in learning the mystery ingredients early. Guidelines and instructions will be provided prior to the start of the contest.
- 11. Workstation set-up and Supplies.** Teams will be given 15 minutes prior to the competition to set up their supplies and equipment in their workstation. Participants should thoroughly wash their hands before beginning the competition. Each team will be provided with two tables and outlet access. Teams are required to bring their own equipment and supplies. Guidelines are included below.
- 12. Mystery Ingredients.** The three mystery ingredients will be revealed and provided to the teams immediately prior to the competition start time. One of the mystery ingredients will be a beef product. If a team member does not eat beef due to food allergies, religious, or cultural reasons, please ensure that they are not the team member handling that food item

13. Pantry Ingredients. Teams will have access to a provided “pantry” of additional ingredients which can be combined with the team’s mystery ingredients to create an original meal during the contest. The “pantry” will include items commonly found in grocery stores such as produce, canned goods, grains, dairy products, etc. Pantry items are first come, first serve during the competition, but contestants are expected to only take what they need and to return items when they are finished using them.

#ontest Timing. Teams will be given 5 minutes to plan their meal after the mystery ingredients have been identified. They will then have 40 minutes to prepare the dish and plan a presentation for the judges.

Food Preparation. Teams will prepare a single serving "meal". A meal is considered a plate of food (entrée, side, dessert, and/or drink) and includes all five food groups from MyPlate. Note: All five food groups do NOT have to be in one recipe/item, but must be represented in the team's meal in some capacity. All three mystery ingredients must be included in some way as well. Each team will create their single serving meal using the provided mystery and pantry ingredients. Teams are challenged to be creative and develop an original recipe. Meals will be plated on the teams' provided plate or bowl and kept warm if needed while awaiting presentation to the judges' panel. Though not required, the Team Worksheet or note cards may be used to write down the recipe that the team creates, along with notes related to nutrition and food safety for the presentation portion.

Food and Equipment Safety. A safe and sanitary working environment must be maintained during the contest at all times. Each station will have food and kitchen safety resources available for reference. Teams should follow the steps listed to ensure proper food and equipment safety. Judges will be scoring teams on food and equipment safety during the preparation phase and presentation. Participants may use the kitchen next to the event room to wash hands if needed during the competition. Pantry produce will be pre-washed.

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, cooked items, and ready to eat items or raw vegetables to prevent cross contamination.

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, bandanna with hair completely pulled back, chef hat with hair restrained inside, or cap with hair completely tucked in. Chef hats will be provided to each contestant, but they may choose to use a different hair restraint method.

17 Presentation. Once the 40 minutes of preparation time expires, team members may no longer communicate with each other. Team members may study their notes individually while they wait for their turn to present. Each team will give a 3-4 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 presentation time to address the following areas of the presentation scorecard: Knowledge of MyPlate, Nutrition Knowledge, Safety Concerns, Food Preparation, and Food Presentation. Teams are encouraged to study additional resources to adequately prepare for this contest and the presentation.

Judging. Time will be called if teams' presentations exceed 4 minutes– 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. 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 minutes to score/write comments. Finished dishes will accompany the team to the judges’ panel. The prepared dish will stay with the judges after the presentation has been made. The meal created will be discarded after the judging has concluded.

#lean-up. Teams are encouraged to clean up their preparation area as they prepare their meal but will have time to finish cleaning their workstation while other teams are doing their presentations. Teams will need to be prepared to wipe down and transport dirty dishes/equipment to be washed at home after the event, as there is not sufficient dish washing facilities at the event site.

Awards. There will be a winning team from the morning session and from the afternoon session. All youth will receive prizes for their participation, and the winning team participants will receive a special prize package. Judges will announce the winning team after their deliberation.

Supply Box Guidelines

Teams are required to bring their own supply boxes to participate in the State Food Challenge. This allows for the event to be free of charge to participants, and eliminates the need to secure a venue with a culinary studio. Teams may bring only the supplies listed below, but are not required to bring every item. Supply boxes may be checked by contest officials as teams check in using a standard or randomized process. Any unapproved equipment or supplies will be removed from the team's supply box.

Supply Box. Each team may bring one to two supply boxes, as long as they contain ONLY approved pantry ingredients and equipment as listed below. Supply boxes must be completely closed and all equipment/supplies should remain inside the box until the start of the contest. An EMPTY tub for dirty dishes may also be brought and does not have to be packed inside of the supply box(es).

Pantry Ingredients. In addition to the "pantry" food items that will be provided to teams during the event, each team may include in their supply box the following 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. Teams may choose which ingredients to include or not include in their supply box.

- Oils (up to 17 oz)
- 1 jar bouillon
- 2 fresh vegetables or canned vegetables (up to 16 oz)
- 2 fresh fruit or canned fruit (up to 16 oz)
- Rice or pasta (up to 16 oz)
- Up to 5 spices
- Cooking Spray

Equipment. Each team will bring a supply box that may contain only one each of the following items, unless a different quantity is noted:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bowls (up to 4 - any size)• Calculator• Can Opener• Colander• Cookie Cutters (up to 2 - team choice)• Cutting Boards (up to 4)• Dry measuring cups (1 set)• Electric Skillet• Extension cord (multiple outlet or strip style)
<i>Teams should check that the extension cord is compatible (2 vs. 3-prong) with their electrical supplies</i>• Food thermometer• Fork• Gloves• Grater• Hot pads (up to 5)• Kitchen shears (1 pair)• Kitchen timer• Knives (up to 6)• Liquid measuring cup• Measuring spoons (1 set) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note cards (1 package, no larger than 5x7)• Pancake turner (up to 2)• Trash bags for dirty equipment• Pot with lid• Potato masher• Potato peeler• Sanitizing wipes (1 container)• Serving dishes/utensils:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 1 plate/platter○ 1 bowl○ 1-2 utensils• Skewers (1 set)• Skillet with lid• Spatulas (up to 2)• Stirring spoon• Storage bags (1 box)• Tongs (up to 2)• Toothpicks (no limit)• Single-burner hot plates (up to 2) OR one double-burner plate (electric only!)• Whisk |
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Team Name: _____ **What are you calling your dish?** _____

Part 1: Knowledge of MyPlate

MyPlate Food Group	Ingredient(s)	What are the key nutrients and their general health function?
Fruit		
Vegetable		
Protein		
Grain		
Dairy		

Part 2: Food Safety

Clean – What did you do to ensure cleanliness in your cooking space?	
Separate – What did you do to prevent cross-contamination?	
Cook – What temperature did you cook food?	
Chill – Where was food stored & held?	

Part 3: Food Preparation and Presentation

Steps:	What was prepared/performed in this step?
Prep - How did you determine which ingredients to use in your dish?	
Make/Cook - How was it made?	
Appearance/Garnish - What did you do enhance the visual appeal?	
Food Pairings - What did you do to enhance or balance flavors?	

4-H FOOD CHALLENGE SCORECARD

TEAM # _____

Team Name					
NAME OF DISH:					
CRITERIA	COMMENTS	OUTSTANDING	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Nutrient Knowledge and Food Group Overview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foods listed in proper food group Key nutrients found in food group General health function of MyPlate food group(s) 					
Food Safety: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean Separate Cook Chill 					
Food Appearance/Quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appearance of food Garnishing Creativity Pairing of flavors 					
Presentation Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductions Voice volume Poise # of members presenting Overall effectiveness of communication 					
Overall comments (tasting optional): 					

Judges Initials