

# **ALABAMA JUNIOR CHEF SY25-26 COMPETITION HANDBOOK**



**Alabama State Department of Education  
CNP School Nutrition Programs**





# Alabama State Department of Education CNP School Nutrition Programs

## SY25-26 Junior Chef Competition Handbook

The Alabama Child Nutrition School Programs Staff is pleased to announce the **Ninth Annual Alabama State Junior Chef Competition!**

This culinary competition aims to inspire students to develop innovative dishes for their school lunch programs. It encourages engagement with school nutrition and offers a platform for students to showcase their culinary talents. High school students statewide will gain valuable experience in recipe development, food preparation, marketing, public presentation, organization, teamwork, and local food systems.

The Alabama Junior Chef Competition aims to inspire students statewide to participate in creating healthier school meals, thereby improving present and future health. Beyond educating students about nutrition, the competition fosters interest in incorporating Alabama-grown products into Child Nutrition Programs. Furthermore, it inspires and prepares the next generation of food-service professionals.





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## Main Changes to SY 25-26 Competition

- The submission no longer has to be one recipe including all three components. The submission may be several different recipes. This change was made after a vote with the SERO team after last year's regional competition.
- Seven teams will be selected to attend Alabama's in-person competition based on their registration packet.
- A \$750 reimbursement stipend will be offered to each of the seven teams selected for the in-person competition.
- The top seven teams will need to bring the small equipment required to cook their dish.

## Timeline

- December 5th, 2025: Deadline to submit your application packet
- December 19th, 2025: The ALSDE announces the top seven teams to attend Alabama's state competition
- January 23rd, 2026: Alabama's state competition will be held at Jefferson State Community College Shelby-Hoover Campus
- January 30th, 2026: The state competition will take place on this date in the case of inclement weather on the 23rd.
- April 23-24, 2026: The Southeast Regional Junior Chef Competition will be held at Jefferson State Community College Shelby-Hoover Campus



## General Information

This year, there will be two rounds within the state competition. Teams must submit their applications by December 5th, 2025. The top seven will be chosen and advance to the in-person state competition. ALSDE will offer a \$750 reimbursement stipend for the top 7 teams to attend in-person on January 23rd, 2026. This will cover mileage, hotel, M & IE, for team members and the team coach and the cost of ingredients for the competition. These funds are made available through a grant and may not be available in future competitions. Travel expenses to the Southeast Regional Competition will be covered for our state winner.

The competition will take place on Friday, January 23, 2026, at Jefferson State Community College Shelby-Hoover Campus (Judy Merritt Building, 4801 Jaguar Dr, Hoover, Alabama 35242) from approximately 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM. School districts/systems are limited to one team per district/system. Each team may consist of two to four students in grades 9-12. Each team must have one adult/coach representative who is employed by the school system. The team adult/coach must also be an employee of the school system.

The Alabama JCC's first-place team will move forward to the Southeast Regional Junior Chef Competition. The SERJCC will take place on Thursday and Friday, April 23 - 24, 2026 at Jefferson State Community College in Hoover, Alabama.

The first, second, and third place winners of the state and regional competition will receive scholarships to attend Sullivan University in Louisville, Kentucky. Scholarship award amounts are to be announced.

**All Alabama JCC entries must be submitted via email on or before COB on December 5, 2025, to Devin Williamson at [CNPNSLP@ALSDE.EDU](mailto:CNPNSLP@ALSDE.EDU) and copy [devin.williamson@alsde.edu](mailto:devin.williamson@alsde.edu).** Entries must include a completed competition registration packet in the original Excel format, and the following forms signed and in PDF format: Requirements and Rules of Competition Form, Registration Form, Permission & Photo Release Form, NSLP Nutrient Analysis supporting documentation via nutrition software, Scholarship Form, and Survey results. Further guidance and instructions are provided in the following guidelines.

### **Successful dishes will:**

- Meet National School Lunch Program meal pattern and nutrition guidelines for grades 9-12
- Be replicable by school nutrition workers (often feeding several hundred students!)
- Be affordable (goal: \$2.12 per plate)
- Have ingredients that are easy to find
- Meet peer approval for taste and appeal
- Incorporate popular food trends into the dish (for example: plant-based, bowls, different cultures, etc.)

## Competition Rules

- Only competing team members may be on the floor during the competition. Coaches may not coach during the competition. Any other involvement is grounds for disqualification of the team. Students may ask ALSDE staff if anything is needed during the competition.
- Each team must prepare their submitted dish exactly how it was entered at submission.
- The recipe must yield 6 servings, plated the same.
- The team must work with the local school system's Child Nutrition Programs Director while developing the recipe. The director will be able to provide the team with a nutrient analysis and assist with crediting and taste testing with students.
- The dish may not be a dessert and cannot contain nuts.
- Once the recipe has been approved and accepted by ALSDE, changes may not be made.

## On-site Cooking Competition Expectations:

- **Please make sure you bring each student's Permission & Photo Release Form including medical payment information (copy of insurance card and I.D.) should your student need medical attention.**
- Team members are expected to wear appropriate footwear (non-slip shoes), clothing (chef pants and jackets), gloves, and hair restraints for the cooking competition.
- Teams are required to purchase and transport their own food/ingredients adhering to HACCP standards during transportation and competition.
- Teams are required to bring all small equipment needed. If an item is difficult to bring, please let us know and we will check with Jefferson State to see if we can borrow from them.
- Temperature of food items will be taken upon the team's arrival to and after it has signed in at the competition site.
- No food preparation may be made ahead of the competition.
- Team will plate the recipe on the dishes provided by the hosting university/college.
- Team must prepare, cook, and plate recipes in an hour and half (90 minutes).
- Team will have an additional half hour (30 minutes) to clean dishes and workspaces.
- Team will give a brief presentation to the judges panel of their dish including description of the dish, an explanation of the recipe's creation, which items were grown in state and which USDA commodity items were included, which farms the food items were purchased from, nutritional value of the dish, survey results, etc. Each team member is expected to take part in the presentation. Be prepared to answer any questions the judges may ask.

## Crediting Guidelines

Each dish must contain the following three components\*:

- ½ cup fruit or vegetable
- 2 oz of meat
- 2 oz of grain (whole or enriched grains only).

**\*Please note that it is now allowable for all three components to be put together in the same recipe or made as separate recipes. The food does not have to be “one recipe.” This is different from last year.**

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Meat/Meat Alternative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in oz equivalents.</li> <li>Dish must contain 2 oz equivalent.</li> <li>Beef, poultry, pork, beans, nut butters, cheese, yogurt, and tofu are all creditable.</li> <li>Use of Food Buying Guide (FBP) to determine how products credit and convert as purchased into edible portions and oz eq.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Grain                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in oz equivalents.</li> <li>Dish must contain 2 oz equivalent.</li> <li>All grains must be whole grain rich (i.e., ≥50% of the grains in the product are whole grains).</li> <li>Purchased breads, buns, bagels and biscuits credit 1 oz by weight = 1 oz eq.</li> <li>Purchased pastas, rice and oats credit as 1 oz dry or ½ cup cooked = 1 oz. eq.</li> <li>Flour in from scratch recipes credits 16 g per serving = 1 oz eq.</li> <li>Cereal grains in from scratch recipes credit 28 g = 1 oz eq.</li> <li>Use Exhibit A for crediting of other purchased grain products.</li> </ul> |
| Fruit                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in cups.</li> <li>Entree must contain at least ½ cup fruit OR vegetable</li> <li>Dried fruit credits as double the volume</li> <li>Minimum creditable amount is ⅛ cup</li> <li>Use the FBG to convert as purchased into edible portion</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Vegetable             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credited in cups.</li> <li>Entree must contain at least ½ cup fruit OR vegetable.</li> <li>Weekly vegetable subgroup requirements.</li> <li>Minimum creditable amount is ⅛ cup.</li> <li>Raw leafy greens credit as half the volume.</li> <li>Use the FBG to convert as purchased into edible portion.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

### Helpful Crediting Resources:

- [The Food Buying Guide](#)
- To access, continue as a guest user and select “school.”
- [Exhibit A Grains Tool](#)

## Nutrition Specifications

|               |                         |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| Calories      | ≤850 kcal               |
| Saturated Fat | <10 % of total calories |
| Sodium        | ≤1,280 mg               |

Teams will be required to work with their Child Nutrition Director to enter their dish into nutrient analysis and crediting software to ensure compliance. Your entry must stay below the nutrient specifications listed above.

## USDA Foods

The submitted dish must incorporate at least one USDA food item **bolded in green in your application packet**. Note: DOD Fresh items do not count as a USDA food item.

Teams may select any USDA foods item from [this list](#). When creating your dish, you do not need to test this directly from CNP's products. You may purchase these items from a grocery store. Please include the exact item in your submission.





## Alabama Grown Ingredients

Each dish must feature at least two Alabama-grown items, **bolded in red in your application packet**. For the purposes of the competition, these foods may be purchased from anywhere; however, teams should know where their dish's items are grown in Alabama. Strong submissions will feature farms nearby or grown in their school garden. This is a strong talking point in the presentation portion of the competition. Any of the items below will be considered an Alabama-grown item for the purpose of the competition regardless of the season it is grown.

| FRUITS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apples</li> <li>• Blackberries</li> <li>• Blueberries</li> <li>• Cantaloupe</li> <li>• Figs</li> <li>• Muscadines</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peaches</li> <li>• Persimmons</li> <li>• Satsumas</li> <li>• Strawberries</li> <li>• Watermelon</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| VEGETABLES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beets</li> <li>• Green bell pepper</li> <li>• Red or orange bell pepper</li> <li>• Broccoli</li> <li>• Butterbeans</li> <li>• Green cabbage</li> <li>• Napa cabbage</li> <li>• Red cabbage</li> <li>• Savoy cabbage</li> <li>• Cauliflower</li> <li>• Collard greens</li> <li>• Corn/sweet corn</li> <li>• Cucumbers</li> <li>• Eggplant</li> <li>• Green beans</li> <li>• Snap/snow green peas</li> <li>• Kale\ Butter lettuce</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaf lettuce</li> <li>• Romaine lettuce</li> <li>• Lima beans</li> <li>• Mustard greens</li> <li>• Okra</li> <li>• Sweet onions</li> <li>• Potatoes</li> <li>• Radishes</li> <li>• Rutabaga</li> <li>• Southern peas</li> <li>• Spinach</li> <li>• Summer squash</li> <li>• Sweet potatoes</li> <li>• Tomatoes</li> <li>• Turnip greens</li> <li>• Acorn squash</li> <li>• Butternut squash</li> <li>• Hubbard squash</li> </ul> |



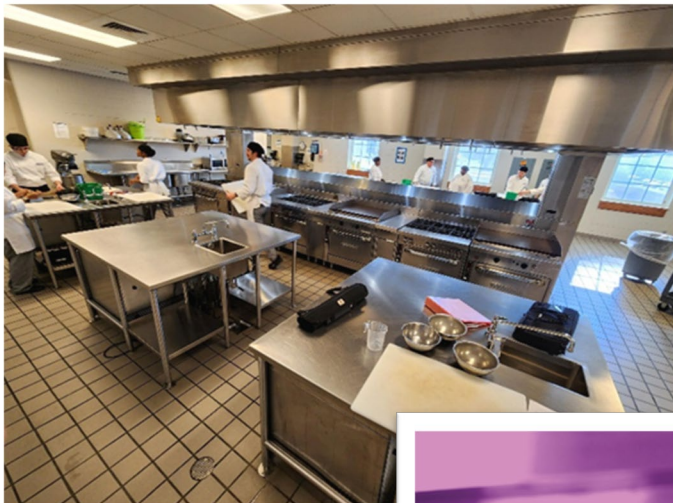
## Equipment

Each team will need to bring the small equipment that is needed to cook their dish. If an item is difficult to bring, please let us know and we will see if we can borrow it from the facility.

**Each station will have:**

- 1 flattop
- 1 stovetop
- 1 prep sink
- 1 under-table fridge/freezer (not all work, so some food will need to sit in coolers)
- 2 combi oven present (per entire facility)

## Facility Photos



## THE CULINARY & HOSPITALITY INSTITUTE

*Jefferson State*  
Community College



The Culinary &  
Hospitality Institute  
Jefferson State Community College

[jeffersonstate.edu/chi](http://jeffersonstate.edu/chi)





## Submission Checklist

**2026 Alabama Junior Chef Registration Packet documents must be completed in Excel Format:**

- ☐ Requirements and Rules Consent Form
- ☐ Registration Form
- ☐ Permission & Photo Release Form
  
- ☐ Ingredients List
- ☐ Recipe Directions
- ☐ Equipment List
- ☐ Workplan Form
- ☐ Crediting/Nutrient Analysis Form and supporting nutrient analysis documentation
  
- ☐ Grocery List
- ☐ Required Plated Entrée Photos
- ☐ Required Plated Grocery List Photos
  
- ☐ Cost Analysis per Serving Form and copy of survey results
- ☐ Entrée Survey Form
- ☐ Scholarship Information Form

**Complete following documents in a signed PDF format document:**

- ☐ Requirements and Rules Consent Form
- ☐ Registration Form
- ☐ Permission & Photo Release Form
  
- ☐ Crediting/Nutrient Analysis - Supporting Nutrient Analysis Documentation
- ☐ Entrée Survey - Supporting Survey Documentation
- ☐ Scholarship Information Form

**Email completed application packets to:**

**Subject Line:** 2026 Alabama State Junior Chef Competition

**To:** [cnpslp@alsde.edu](mailto:cnpslp@alsde.edu). **Copy:** [devin.williamson@alsde.edu](mailto:devin.williamson@alsde.edu)

**For questions,** contact Devin Williamson, Registered Dietitian at [devin.williamson@alsde.edu](mailto:devin.williamson@alsde.edu) or phone: 334-603-2736.

