



ARKANSAS 4-H

# FOOD CHALLENGE



**UofA** DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION  
*University of Arkansas System*

## District Food Challenge Manual

## Objectives

- Equip youth to demonstrate their knowledge and skills when preparing and presenting a dish
- Provide youth skills to learn from additional team members
- Train youth to learn how to combat food scarcity
- Encourage teamwork
- Provide public speaking opportunities
- Offer leadership opportunities to participate in a new, exciting, competitive event

## Contest Eligibility

1. Participants must be 4-H members currently enrolled in the Arkansas 4-H Enrollment System. There is no limit to how many teams you can bring to District.
2. County-level Food Challenge practices and contests are encouraged to help youth prepare for district competition.
3. **Age:** Age divisions are determined by 4-Hers' age as of January 1 of the current year.
  - Junior Division: Ages 8-10
  - Intermediate Division: Ages 11-13
  - Senior Division: Ages 14-19
4. **Members per team:** Teams may be made up of 2-4 individuals. Please designate one team member as the team captain. All team members must come from the same county.
5. **Combined Ages:** We are adding a new Intermediate age division this year. Teams can include a combination of juniors and intermediates when necessary. The age division is determined by the oldest team members. Teams are NOT allowed to combine different ages to create a Senior team under any circumstances.
  - *Example: A team of 2 Juniors and 2 Intermediates will compete in the Intermediate age division*
6. **Substitution:** If an emergency prevents a 4-Her from participating, substitutions are allowed to maintain the original number of registered participants and/or team members. All substitutions must be approved by the contest coordinator.

## Registration

1. This is a County Agent/Staff Only registration; teams cannot register for the event.
  - *Information on how to register will be sent to the local county extension office.*
2. Teams may only register and compete at one district contest.
3. Teams may compete at any district location.
4. Teams will need to register through District Food Challenge Event Registration in the Arkansas 4-H System.
5. Only team registrations submitted through the Arkansas 4-H System will be accepted.

6. All team members must be current 4-H members enrolled in the Arkansas 4-H Enrollment System. They need to have completed their enrollment, including the code of conduct and an up-to-date health form.
7. When registering, each team must designate a coach and a team captain. All correspondence will be sent to the designated coach's email address and the local county extension agent on the submitted form.
8. If an entire team needs to cancel a registration submitted through the Arkansas 4-H Enrollment System, the team's County Extension office must notify the contest coordinator in writing via email (rdillon@uada.edu) prior to the registration deadline. Cancellations not submitted by the deadline will still be charged the registration fee.
9. Exceptions to this policy may be made in cases of personal or immediate family illness or death. In all cases, the County Extension office is responsible for notifying the contest coordinator.
10. Refunds, when approved, will be issued according to the following schedule:
  - 75% refund: 15 or more working days before the event
  - 50% refund: 11–14 working days before the event
  - No refund: 10 or fewer working days before the event

## Contest Rules

1. The contest will consist of four categories:
  - Appetizer
  - Healthy Dessert
  - Main Dish
  - Side Dish
2. Teams will be randomly assigned to a category and notified either during the team orientation meeting or during contest registration on the day of the contest.
3. Based on the number of teams registered, the contest coordinator may determine whether:
  - All teams compete in the same category, or
  - Teams are assigned to different categories
4. Teams may be made up of 2-4 individuals. Teams should refer to the Contest Eligibility section for additional requirements.
5. Each team must supply all of its own equipment for the challenge. Only items listed on the Supply Box Checklist are allowed.
6. Supply boxes will be checked by contest officials as teams check in on the day of the contest. Any unapproved, unsafe, or unclean items will be removed from the supply boxes and given to the team's coach. It is up to each team to decide what type of box to use to store their supplies.
7. County teams may share a supply box only if all of the following conditions are met:
  - The contest schedule permits sharing
  - Written approval is received from the contest coordinator at least two weeks prior to the contest

- Supplies are fully cleaned before the next team uses them
  - The supply box is rechecked prior to each team's competition
8. Teams should be prepared to plug in only one heat source at a time during the contest preparation phase to avoid potential power issues. Teams will be notified during orientation if this is the case.
  9. 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 the preparation.
  10. Each team should dress appropriately for food preparation. Teams may be asked to remove items deemed unsafe to wear during food preparation.
  11. Team members must wear non-slip closed-toe shoes, a long-sleeve shirt, pants, and hair restraints. No full or draping sleeves are allowed. Each team may coordinate clothing, aprons, or hair coverings.
  12. No electronic devices or jewelry (except for medically required) are allowed in the contest. This includes cell phones, smartwatches, and other communication devices.
  13. Team members caught with or using electronic devices (except for medically required use) will automatically disqualify the entire team and be asked to leave.
  14. If you require reasonable accommodation to participate, need materials in a different format, have special dietary needs, food allergies, or other known allergies related to this contest, you must notify the contest coordinator in writing via email ([rdillon@uada.edu](mailto:rdillon@uada.edu)) at least 2 weeks before the contest or include this information in the contest registration.
  15. At the contest coordinators' discretion, coaches, parents, and family members may watch only their own team during the preparation and presentation phases. More specific instructions will be provided during orientation or on the day of the competition.
  16. Spectators may not interact with the teams while they are participating in the contest. If they do and a contest official or volunteer is made aware, it could result in a point deduction or disqualification of the team.

## Contest Procedures

1. General guidelines, resources, and instructions will be provided prior to the contest.
2. The contest coordinator will provide a Team Orientation Zoom meeting for all participants.
3. Each team will be directed to a cooking/preparation station (one table).
4. No ingredient amounts, recipes, or instructions will be provided at the station.
5. There will be a "key" ingredient at each station.
6. With the "key" ingredient provided and access to a "grocery store" of additional ingredients, each team will have 40 minutes to:
  - Plan and prepare a dish
  - Plan a presentation
  - Clean up their assigned preparation area
7. The "key" ingredient will represent the category to which the team has been assigned.

8. The team will be sent to wash their hands and receive instructions on where everything is located.
9. After washing their hands, they will be told their “key” ingredient, and the timer will start.
10. Teams cannot open the box or put on gloves until the timer starts.
11. Teams must select and use at least two items from the “grocery store”. Teams will have a maximum number of items they may select from the “grocery store”, and they will be notified of this limit during the team orientation.
12. The items provided will be typical of what one can find in a store, such as
  - Produce
  - Canned goods
  - Dry goods
  - Fresh meats
13. Teams should not create additional side dishes, multiple dishes, and/or drinks with their ingredients or “grocery store” items. Teams should only create an Appetizer, a Healthy Dessert, a Main Dish, or a Side Dish.
14. At the grocery store:
  - A list of available items will be provided and updated in real time
  - Items will be purchased with coins provided by the contest coordinator
  - One coin will equal one purchase/item
  - Teams will indicate what they want to purchase to the volunteer helping with the grocery store
  - A fixed amount of each item will be distributed, as determined by the contest coordinator
  - Once an item is sold out, it will no longer be available for purchase
15. A grocery list example will be provided as a resource during the Zoom Orientation. This does not indicate what will be included on the day of the competition. The contest coordinator reserves the right to add or change the grocery list based on availability.
16. No cost analysis will be required for the contest.
17. Teams should prepare and present one entire dish with a recipe. Teams will be responsible for:
  - Determining the total number of servings their dish provides
  - Communicating that number to the judges
18. Teams will be required to submit a recipe card with their completed dish using a survey link that will be provided on the day of the contest. During the cooking period, designate a team member to write down the team’s recipe. Once teams have completed the presentation, they must submit a recipe by the deadline set forth by the competition coordinator.
19. Each team will create a minimum of 2 servings of their dish.
  - One serving will be for plating using one of the serving dishes in the team's kit
  - The remaining serving will be divided into tasting portions for each judge (up to 3)
  - The number of tasting portions required will be given at registration on the day of the contest
  - Judges' tasting cups and utensils will be provided by contest officials

- Please note: The State Contest will have different serving requirements
20. Each team will have the following printed materials at their cooking station. These include:
- MyPlate Mini Poster
  - Fight BAC! – Fight Foodborne Bacteria Brochure
  - Know Your Nutrients
  - Food & Kitchen Safety Fact Sheet
  - Function of Ingredients Fact Sheet
21. No other resource materials will be allowed. Teams may not use personal copies of the resources during the contest.
22. Contest officials are not responsible for any equipment malfunctions the team may experience during the preparation period.
23. Teams should plan for no access to a kitchen facility during the contest. Dirty dishes must be placed in a plastic container, trash bag, or box for cleaning after the contest. If multiple teams are allowed to share a box, cleaning instructions will be provided.

## Judging and Presentation

1. Teams will be evaluated by judges during the contest's preparation phase on the following criteria:
  - Teamwork
  - Safety concerns and practices
  - Preparation
  - Management
2. Teams should refer to the Arkansas 4-H Preparation Scorecard for more details about the scoring of the team preparation section.
3. Only participants and contest officials will be allowed in the food preparation area; however, spectators may watch from assigned areas if deemed by the contest coordinator.
4. Participants can only take notecards into the presentation area. No worksheets will be allowed.
5. Once the time has been called during the preparation phase, teams must take their kit and food with them. Teams must not speak to each other about anything contest-related until they are in front of the presentation judges.
6. Team coaches will need to be prepared to take their kit from them once the team leaves the preparation area before entering the presentation area.
7. After the preparation phase of the contest, each team will give a presentation to a panel of judges. All team members must participate in the presentation.
8. Judging time will include:
  - 5 minutes for presentation
  - 3 minutes for judges' questions
  - 3 minutes between team presentations for judges to score and write comments
9. Each team is allowed up to five (5) minutes for their presentation, during which they should highlight:

- Knowledge of MyPlate
  - Nutrition knowledge
  - Chronic disease prevention
  - Food preparation
  - Safety concerns and practices
  - Serving size information of the dish prepared
10. Judges will also take into consideration the appearance and quality of the food, the team's creativity, effective communication, and teamwork when scoring the team presentation section.
11. Teams should refer to the Arkansas 4-H Presentation Scorecard for more details about the scoring of the team presentation.
12. Judges may taste teams' dishes at their personal discretion.
13. Following the team presentation, the judges may ask questions of the team, which will be considered by the judges when scoring the overall presentation.

## Awards and Advancement

1. Team awards will be determined by the contest coordinator and are based on sponsorships and available funds.
2. The top 3 teams in each age division will be recognized at each district location and will advance to the State contest.
3. The 1st place Senior team at the state contest will advance to the National Food Challenge in September 2026. Individuals who win the Arkansas 4-H State Food Challenge and then compete at the National Food Challenge are not eligible to compete again in the Arkansas Food Challenge.
4. The top teams will advance to the Mid-South Competition in February 2027.
  - Selection will be based on ranking, age eligibility, and contest rules
  - Advancement may include all Senior teams or a combination of Senior and Intermediate teams
  - Invitations will be sent to the eligible teams
5. Only the number of team members who qualify at the district level will qualify for the State competition. No additional members can be added to the team after the district competition.
6. Substitutions for the State contest are allowed under the following conditions:
  - The number of team members remains the same as competed at District
  - Substitutes must come from the same county
7. Should a team forfeit to compete at State, this will not alter the teams that are eligible to attend.
  - *Example: if a 3rd-place team decides not to register for State, the 4th-place team will not move up into that contest slot*

## General Information

1. The Arkansas 4-H Food Challenge District Manual was developed using the 2025 National 4-H Food Challenge Rules/Guidelines and the 2026 Mid-South 4-H Food Pantry Competition Guidelines as references.
2. All participants (contest and educational activities) are required to have adequate adult chaperones.
3. Travel and lodging arrangements are the responsibility of each county.
4. Additional information and resources for the Arkansas 4-H Food Challenge will be available at <https://4h.uada.edu/programs/healthy-living/healthylivingeventsandcompetitions.aspx>.
5. Questions may be directed to Rachel Dillon, Arkansas 4-H Program Associate-Health, [rdillon@uada.edu](mailto:rdillon@uada.edu), 501-671-2138.

## Contest Resources and Worksheets

1. [Supply Box Checklist](#)
2. Arkansas 4-H Food Challenge Scorecards
  - [Preparation](#)
  - [Presentation](#)
3. [Competition Resource Materials](#)
4. 4-H Team Worksheets
  - [Team Worksheet](#)
  - [Presentation Worksheet](#)
5. Grocery Store Example (*made available at Team Zoom Orientation*)

## Additional Resources:

In preparation for the Food Challenge contest, participants should not limit themselves to studying only the resources provided at the contest. Resources that may be helpful include (but are not limited to):

- [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#)
- [EatRight.org- Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics](#)
- [Fight Bac!](#)
- [Texas 4-H: Nutritional Concepts](#)
- [Texas 4-H: Calorie Dense vs. Nutrient Dense](#)
- [Texas 4-H: Explore Guide- Food Challenge](#)
- [Texas 4-H: Preparation Principles and Function of Ingredients](#)

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