

# Junior Chef Competition

## “Savor the Flavor of Mississippi”



### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

#### 1. Who is eligible to participate in the Mississippi Junior Chef Competition?

High school students in **grades 9–12** enrolled in a Mississippi public school are eligible. Teams must consist of **2 to 4 students** and be supervised by a **Culinary Arts Instructor** employed by the school district.

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#### 2. Can a school submit more than one team?

Yes, but **no more than 3 teams per district** may be submitted. If more than three teams wish to participate, the **district must decide which teams will compete.**

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#### 3. What is the role of the Culinary Arts Instructor?

Instructors are required to:

- Supervise their team(s) at all competition levels
  - Submit all required forms and recipes by the deadlines
  - **They may not assist** with cooking during the competition
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#### 4. What kind of recipes can students submit?

Recipes must be:

- Nutritious and **meet USDA school meal standards**
  - Include **at least 3 meal components** (e.g., Meat/Meat Alternate, Grain, Fruit/Vegetable)
  - Include **at least 2 Mississippi-grown products ("MS Goods")**
  - Include **1 USDA food item** or describe the intended USDA item if unavailable
  - Yield **6 servings** (1 for display, 5 for judges)
  - Be **realistic for preparation in a school cafeteria**
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#### 5. Do teams need to bring their own ingredients?

Yes, all ingredients must be brought by the team. Host sites provide the kitchen space and equipment, but **not the ingredients.**

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#### 6. How are the recipes evaluated?

Recipes are evaluated for:

- Nutritional quality
  - Taste and presentation
  - Creativity and use of Mississippi-grown items
  - Practicality for school meal service
  - Compliance with safety and sanitation standards
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## 7. Who completes the nutrient analysis, and how?

Teams may:

- Work with their **local Food Service Director**, or
  - Request help from MDE's **Registered Dietitian**
- Final recipes must be submitted with a **complete nutrient analysis** by **October 31, 2025**.
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## 8. What forms must be submitted with the application?

Each team member must complete:

- A **Photo Release Form**
- A **Liability Release Form**

These forms are **included in the application packet** and **must be submitted by October 15, 2025**, along with the full team application.

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## 9. What are the competition stages and dates?

- **Regional Competitions:**  
January 19–23, 2026 | Locations TBD  
One winning team from each region advances to state.
- **State Competition:**  
February 24, 2026 | Location TBD  
One winner will represent Mississippi at Regionals.

### **SERO Regional Competition:**

April 23–24, 2026

#### **Jefferson State Community College – Shelby-Hoover Campus, Alabama**

- Teams compete against other southeastern states at the SERO Regional Junior Chef Competition for scholarships to Sullivan University located in Louisville, Kentucky:
    - 1st Place – \$10,000 per student
    - 2nd Place – \$7,000–\$8,000 per student
    - 3rd Place – \$5,000 per student
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## 10. What are the Educational Presentations/Videos that are required and why?

As part of the Mississippi Junior Chef Competition, each team is required to view a series of educational videos designed to enhance their understanding of key topics related to school food service. These presentations help ensure that participants are prepared not only to compete but also to contribute meaningfully to school nutrition efforts. The required videos are:

### INITIAL TO CONFIRM THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS SECTION

- **School Nutrition:** *CICN: A Roadmap for Success: Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills for Chefs in Schools* (March 2025)  
*Purpose:* Introduces essential skills and knowledge for working in school food environments, aligned with professional standards.
- **Farm to School:** *STAR: Farm to School: Tips for Increasing Locally Grown or Raised Food Options* (September 2025)  
*Purpose:* Highlights ways to incorporate more local foods into school meals, supporting healthier options and local agriculture.
- **Food Safety:** *STAR: Best Practices for Serving Safe Foods – From Receiving to Serving* (September 2024)  
*Purpose:* Covers critical food safety practices to ensure safe food handling throughout all stages of meal preparation.

These resources are required to help students gain a foundational understanding of the principles guiding school food programs, including nutrition, sustainability, and food safety.

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## 11. What are the required Work Plan components for the Junior Chef team?

Each Junior Chef team is required to submit a **Work Plan** as part of their application. The Work Plan outlines how the team will prepare for the competition and clearly defines responsibilities and tasks. It must include the following components:

### 1. Person Responsible

For each task, the team must identify **who** is responsible. This ensures that every team member has a clear role and is actively participating in the project.

### 2. Detailed Task List

The task list should break down all steps required to complete the competition process. This includes (but is not limited to):

- **Recipe Development**
  - Research healthy, school-compliant recipes
  - Select ingredients that meet USDA meal pattern guidelines
  - Test recipes and make adjustments
  - Document final recipe

- **Ingredient Sourcing**
  - Identify locally grown or raised ingredients
  - Coordinate with local farmers or vendors
  - Ensure ingredients are cost-effective and available
- **Food Preparation**
  - Assign cooking roles for each team member
  - Practice preparation techniques
  - Time the preparation to meet competition time limits
- **Food Safety**
  - Watch required food safety training video
  - Implement safe food handling practices during all phases
- **Presentation**
  - Plan plating and visual presentation of dish
  - Practice explaining the dish to judges
  - Prepare talking points about local ingredients and nutrition
- **Documentation**
  - Complete recipe submission form
  - Submit nutritional analysis (if required)
  - Upload or turn in any required paperwork
- **Team Communication & Scheduling**
  - Set meeting and practice times
  - Coordinate with mentor and school nutrition staff
  - Assign a team lead or point of contact

A strong Work Plan shows that the team is organized, collaborative, and understands the full process from concept to competition. Teams are encouraged to revisit and update their Work Plan regularly as they progress.

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## 12. What is the requirement for the taste test component for Junior Chef Teams?

Each Junior Chef Team is required to **conduct a taste test** as part of the recipe development process. This ensures that the final recipe appeals to the target audience—**students who will be eating the meals in school cafeterias.**

To meet this requirement, teams must:

### **Conduct Taste Tests with Multiple Students and/or Multiple Times**

- The taste test must involve **more than one student** and/or be conducted **more than once.**

- The goal is to gather a variety of opinions from the student population to ensure the recipe is broadly appealing.

### Collect and Incorporate Feedback

- Teams must **actively collect feedback** from students during the taste test process.
- This feedback should be used to **refine the recipe**, such as adjusting flavor, texture, appearance, or portion size.

### Document the Process

- Teams should keep records showing:
  - How the taste tests were conducted
  - How many students participated
  - What type of feedback was received
  - What changes were made to the recipe as a result
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### Why It Matters

This component is critical because it shows that the team understands the importance of student input in creating meals that are nutritious and enjoyable. Recipes that are well-received by students are more likely to be adopted in actual school meal programs.

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**13. Can my school host a regional competition?**  YES  NO

Yes! The **MDE Office of Child Nutrition** is looking for school districts interested in **hosting a Mississippi Regional Competition**.

To learn more, contact:

**chenderson@mdek12.org** | (601) 576-4970

If answer YES, please list your contact information:

School District

School Name

Instructor (First Name and Last Name)

Email Address

Phone Number