



Maine Farm to School Cook Off Rules and Guidelines



Overview

The Maine Farm to School Cook-off is a statewide culinary competition for teams of school nutrition professionals and students to promote local foods in school meals. Each team, consisting of one Child Nutrition Employee and one other person from the district (student or staff), is tasked to prepare two lunch meals (one breakfast meal and one lunch meal) using specific recipe guidelines and time restrictions, and will present to a panel of judges.

Timeline at a Glance

- December 31, 2025 – Team Registration Due
- January 22, 2026 @ 1:30pm- Mandatory Team Meeting
- February 13, 2026 – Recipes Due to Child Nutrition
- March 16- 27, 2026- Regional Competitions take place!
- April 3, 2026 – Finalists Announced
- April 14, 2026 – Cook Off Finals

Recipe Guidelines & Submission

- The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern will be used for the breakfast and lunch meal.
 - The breakfast meal must meet the **required offering for grades K-12**. This includes 1 oz grain, 1 cup fruit and one additional item. Milk can be excluded from the meal.
 - The lunch meal must meet the **required offering for grades 9-12**. This includes 2 oz grain, 2 oz meat/meat alternate, 1 cup fruit and 1 cup vegetable. Milk can be excluded from the meal.
- Both meals must contain:
 - At least one USDA food
 - At least three local ingredients (defined as grown, raised, caught or manufactured in Maine) with one being a challenge ingredient. **Wild Blueberries will be the challenge ingredient for breakfast and ground beef will be the challenge ingredient for lunch**. The challenge ingredients will be sourced by Child Nutrition and supplied to each team on the day of the competition.
- All recipes must be tested in a school kitchen. Five bonus points will be given if a video is provided showing taste testing of the recipe being submitted with students or classrooms!

- Recipes must contain the following information:
 - Name of recipe
 - Type of dish (ex: breakfast entrée, lunch entrée, side)
 - Scaled to 50 servings
 - Portion size
 - Ingredients in measurable amounts (ex: 2 ½ cups tomatoes, not 5 tomatoes)
 - Complete Instructions
 - Meal pattern contribution information
- **Completed recipes must be typed using the provided template and submitted by February 13, 2026. Crediting will be checked by Child Nutrition staff.**
- **Any recipe submitted in the incorrect format or incomplete will be returned for corrections.**
- All recipes submitted will be used in a Farm to School Cook- book.
- When considering which recipes to use keep in mind the division of work between team members. The goal of this competition is to involve students as much as possible in the preparation and cooking.

Not sure which recipe to choose? Select from the resource links below (recipes are all standardized and include meal pattern contribution).

- Healthy School Recipes: <https://healthyschoolrecipes.com/>
- Child Nutrition Recipe Box: <https://theicn.org/cnr/>
- Maine DOE Culinary Classroom recipes:
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition/programs/culinary/recipesandphotos>

Judging & Scoring Criteria

The following scoring criteria will be used to evaluate the lunch meals. Please review the [scoring sheets](#) with your team. **Any team that is late to the competition (regionals or finals) will be deducted points from their overall score.**

- Creative use of challenge ingredients
- Presentation, Taste, and Feasibility to be used in school nutrition programs
- Teamwork and division of work
- Food safety and time management in the kitchen

The judging panel will consist of:

- K-12 student (past cook-off winner if possible)
- Professional Chef
- School Nutrition Director

This competition is all about promoting and educating about the wonderful things happening in school nutrition programs. We have selected people as judges who have a diverse range of culinary and food expertise and to get the student perspective.

Important Competition Details!

Three servings of the breakfast and lunch meal must be prepared. We will take pictures of the dishes to be included in the Farm to School Cookbook.

The schedule will be as follows:

- **Cooking round 1: One hour** of kitchen time to complete the breakfast meal and work on prep of the lunch meal.
- **Judging round 1:** Breakfast meal; each team will be given time to describe their meal and for judges to ask questions.
- **Cooking round 2: 30 minutes** of kitchen time to complete the lunch meal.
- **Judging round 2:** Lunch meal; each team will be given time to describe their meal and for judges to ask questions.

Child Nutrition will provide:

- Black aprons and hats with Farm to School Cook-off logo for all participants
- Challenge ingredients
- A compost bucket to dispose of any food scraps/waste
- An equipment list for the cook-off kitchen location will be provided to the teams.

Team Expectations:

- All preparation must be done on site. No exceptions! 5 points will automatically be deducted for any pre-made items.
- Test and practice with your recipes beforehand
- Teams are expected to look professional and meet the dress code of the Culinary Classroom while participating in the cook off. We often have media present and it's important to portray the professional side of school nutrition. This includes the following:
 - ✓ Beard restraint, if applicable.
 - ✓ Closed toe/back shoes.
 - ✓ Long pants, no leggings.
 - ✓ A plain wedding band is the only jewelry allowed.
 - ✓ Nails must be clean and trimmed. Nail polish and artificial nails will not be allowed.

Reimbursement for Team Expenses

There is funding available for cook-off teams to be reimbursed for food (\$100) and supplies (\$50). All reimbursement checks will go to the district's school nutrition department. In order to be reimbursed a State of Maine expense form and all accompanying food and supply receipts

must be emailed to Michele Bisbee at michele.bisbee@maine.gov. Examples of supplies that would count include:

- Trays/plates for presenting the meals to judges.
- Equipment needed to safely transport ingredients to the competition. Any questions can be directed to Michele Bisbee or Stephanie Stambach.

Day of Competition Reminders

- Arrive early to review rules and guidelines and to tour the kitchen facility.
- Bring recipes and all recipe ingredients and come with a backup plan!
- Bring small wares, if needed
- Clean the kitchen, equipment, and small wares used prior to leaving the location. Participants will be made accountable for any damages to equipment.
- Practice good sanitation throughout the entire competition
- No coaching is allowed in the kitchen during the competition.