
Food Challenge Essentials

The 4-H Food Challenge is another way that 4-H members can exhibit the knowledge and skills they gain in the 4-H Foods and Nutrition Project.

The challenge is modeled after competitions such as the Food Network's *Iron Chef*. Teams create dishes using only a predetermined number and amount of ingredients. From these ingredients, team members must develop a recipe and prepare the dish.

The teams then make a presentation to a judging panel, explaining the preparation steps, serving size, nutritional value, and cost of the dish.

Basics

4-H members form teams of three to five members. Although the teams do not select their food categories beforehand, they can still prepare for the competition. Ample preparation will give them the confidence and skills to do their best. Preparation can include having practice challenges, studying the nutrients in various foods, and practicing how to determine serving size and cost per serving.

The teams must provide their own equipment, as specified in the 4-H Food Challenge guidelines. At the start of the contest, each team is given a set of ingredients and a clue to help them determine what dish to prepare. A "pantry" of additional ingredients is also available for the teams to incorporate into their recipe. Each set of ingredients is based on a recipe that fits one of these: dairy, fruits and vegetables, grains, and protein.

The teams are assigned randomly to categories, which are announced at the start of the contest. Team members will have 40 minutes to research the nutrients in the dish, determine the benefits of these nutrients, analyze the cost of the dish, and prepare the recipe.

The teams then make presentations to the judges. At least three team members must have speaking roles in the presentation. The judges may also ask questions of the team members.

Teams are also judged on the appearance of the food prepared and their presentation skills (including voice, poise, the number of members presenting, and overall effectiveness of communication).

Review the scorecard for the Food Challenge to help the 4-H'ers prepare for the presentation and question-and-answer segment of the judging process.

Conducting the Food Challenge

The Food Challenge requires much planning. A planning guide is available for you and your task force members.

Space and equipment needed

Rooms

- 1 large room for group assembly, participant orientation, and the awards program (this room can also serve as a holding room for parents and leaders)
- 1 large room for the preparation phase of the contest
- Judging rooms for team presentations
- 1 room for tabulation and to serve as the contest headquarters

Tables

- 1 worktable for each team to use during the preparation phase of the contest
- 1 table for each team of judges for the team presentations
- 1 or 2 tables for registration

Volunteers needed

- **Group leaders:** Monitor the teams during the 40-minute preparation period of the contest; answer questions of teams (without providing help to the teams); and monitor the teams to be sure there is no talking before team presentations
- **Timekeeper:** Keeps time during the preparation phase of the contest, warns teams of the time remaining

- **Judges:** Evaluate each team presentation; will need a panel of two to three judges per age division and/or category
- **Registration personnel:** Work at the registration table to greet and check in contestants, judges, parents, leaders, and guests

Conducting the Food Challenge as a learning experience

4-H clubs and project groups may want to use the Food Challenge as an informal educational activity. It can be a great way to conclude a food and nutrition project meeting or workshop. The members can test their knowledge and skills while also learning about the Food Challenge contest.

Follow these steps to conduct the Food Challenge:

- Provide ample workspace for teams. A kitchen is not necessary if each team has the supplies needed.
- Acquire all the supplies teams will need (or ask each team to bring its own supplies, according to the Food Challenge supply list).
- Select several recipes (more than one team can have the same recipe). The recipes should be simple, have no elaborate ingredients, and not require an oven.
- Divide the group into teams of three to five members. For a learning experience, older members can be on teams with younger members; this gives older members the opportunity to serve in leadership roles.
- Read the rules aloud to the 4-H members.
- Have the teams report to their assigned stations, where each will find a set of ingredients and their supplies.
- At the start signal, give the teams 40 minutes to develop a recipe, prepare the dish, and develop a presentation for the judges.
- Call time after 40 minutes, when all teams must stop their work.
- Have each team make a presentation to the entire group. This will enable the teams to learn from each other as they hear a variety of presentations and see the different dishes prepared.
- Have the teams discuss with each other the challenges and lessons learned through their experience.

Resources

- *District 4-H Food Challenge Guidelines* (contact your district 4-H specialist)
- *State 4-H Food Challenge Guidelines* (updated and distributed annually in September): texas4-h.tamu.edu
- *Altering Recipes for Good Health*
- *Cooking Basics for Dummies*, 3rd edition
- *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 2010
- FightBac
- MyPlate
- *Nutrient Needs at a Glance*

Specialists

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