

New Mexico 4-H & FFA Food Challenge Rules & Guidelines

1. **Participation:** Participants must be 4-H or FFA members currently enrolled in a New Mexico 4-H Youth Development County program or FFA Chapter.

2. **Age:**

	Novice	Junior	Senior
Grade*	3 rd , 4 th , 5 th	6 th , 7 th	8 th and up
Age as of January 1 of the current 4-H Year (October-September)	8 year olds in the 3 rd grade, 9 year olds, 10 year olds, 11 year olds in the 5 th grade	11 year olds in the 6 th grade; 12 year olds; 13 year olds in the 7 th grade	13 year olds in the 8 th grade; 14 year olds; 15 year olds; 16 year olds; 17 year olds; 18 year olds; Youth who are 19 by December 31 of the current 4-H year are not eligible to enroll as a 4-H member.

*These are standard grades based on public school general ages. Exceptions such as home or private schools or youth who have skipped a grade must be determined under the appropriate age. Youth do not move up in an age group until October of the next 4-H year, therefore, youth participate in summer and fall fair activities as the grade they just completed.

Teams per county: Each 4-H county club may enter a maximum of two teams in each age division: two Novice, two Junior and two Senior teams. FFA may enter a maximum of one team per chapter.

Members per team: Each team will have at least three and a maximum four members. On a senior team, every team member must be senior age. A novice may participate on a junior team, but if even one junior is on a team, the entire team must compete in the junior division. Under no circumstances will a participant be allowed to compete at a lower age level.

State Fair Contests: Two New Mexico 4-H Food Challenge contests will be held in 2026: one at the New Mexico State Fair in Albuquerque, and one at the Southern New Mexico State Fair in Las Cruces. Counties may participate in only one of these contests. If a county team earns second place at the New Mexico State Fair, they are not eligible to compete at the Southern New Mexico State Fair in an attempt to earn a higher placing.

Exception for 2026: For this year only, district restrictions will not apply. Counties are free to choose which contest to attend, regardless of their district. For example, Bernalillo County may choose to participate in the Southern New Mexico State Fair if desired. **FFA will only be allowed to compete at Southern New Mexico State Fair as a pilot project to determine interest for future New Mexico 4-H Food Challenge events.*

Expect changes for 2027 as we review contest structure and participation guidelines.

Entry fee: Each team must pay a **\$25.00 registration fee** to cover the cost of ingredients for the contest. If State 4-H Office does not receive entry fee by deadline, the team will not participate in contest.

Food categories & Preparation: There will be four food categories in each age division: Appetizer, Main Dish, Side Dish, and Healthy Dessert. Teams will be randomly assigned to a category, which will not be announced until the day of the contest.

Each team will have 40 minutes to prepare a dish, plan a presentation, and clean up the preparation area.

Preparation: Each team will create an entire dish/recipe (not a full meal) using the provided key ingredient and grocery store items. Teams must select and use at least two items and will be provided the maximum number of items they can select during orientation. Dishes/recipes created should include two or more servings. Teams should present the entire dish/ recipe to the judges and communicate during their presentation what an individual serving size should be. Teams will be responsible for determining the number of servings their dish provides. Teams should not create side or multiple dishes with their ingredients/grocery store items

Attire: Each team will have the option of wearing coordinated clothing, aprons or hair coverings. Appropriate clean hair coverings include: caps, bandanas, skull caps and hair nets. Long hair must be tied back. Long pants and closed toed shoes required.

Gloves: *Gloves do not have to be worn throughout the contest; however, there should always be a barrier between your hand and any food touched. A barrier includes gloves and/or cooking utensil. When wearing gloves, they must be changed between handling raw meats/seafood; handling cooked items; and ready to eat items or raw vegetables to prevent cross contamination.*

Hair Restraint: Each team member must wear a hat, hair net and/or other type of hair restraint during the food preparation part of the competition. Examples of acceptable hair restraints include hairnets, bandana with hair completely pulled back, Chef hat with hair restrained inside, or cap with hair completely tucked in.

Food and Equipment Safety: A safe and sanitary working environment must be maintained during the contest. Each station will have food and kitchen safety resources. Teams should follow the steps listed to ensure proper food and equipment safety is followed. Judges will be scoring teams on food and equipment safety during the preparation phase of the contest. Teams should also discuss safety steps used during the presentation phase of the contest.

Nutrition: Each station will have a variety of nutrition resources/references. Each team should highlight key nutrients in their dish and their functions during their presentation.

Cost analysis: Team will **not be** required to analyze cost of the recipe, nor will this be included in the presentation or scoring of the contest.

Presentation: Following the preparation phase of the contest, each team will give a 5 minute presentation to a panel of judges. A majority of team members should participate in the presentation.

To earn maximum points, teams must use the 5 minute presentation to address the following areas of the presentation scorecard: Knowledge of MyPlate, Nutrition Knowledge, Food Preparation, Safety Concerns, Serving Size, and **Dietary Guideline key points.**

At the end of 5 minutes, time will be called – additional time will not be allowed. Judges will be allowed 3 minutes to ask questions. Judges will not ask questions related to what teams should have covered during the presentation. Judges questions will be related to general nutrition, health, chronic disease prevention or others relevant to food and nutrition. Following questions, judges will have 4 minutes to score/write comments.

Please note: Once the 40 minutes of preparation time expires, team members may no longer communicate with each other. Team members may study their notes individually.

Clean-up: Teams must clean up their preparation areas. Clean-up time is included in the 40-minute preparation allotment.

Finished Dishes: Finished dishes MAY NOT leave the preparation/judging areas. Dishes must be discarded after teams complete the judging process to ensure teams in following heats do not see what ingredients are available to gain an advantage.

Resources: Resource materials will be provided for each team at the contest. These include MyPlate Mini Poster, Fight Bac – Fight Foodborne Bacteria Brochure, Know Your Nutrients, Food Safety Fact Sheet, Food Challenge Worksheet and Dietary Guideline Key points. No other resource materials will be allowed. Teams may not use their personal copies of the resources during the contest. Cell phones and other electronic devices will not be allowed in the contest area.

Supply box: Each team must supply their own equipment for the challenge. Teams may bring only the supplies listed in the supply box section. Supply boxes may be checked by contest officials as teams check in for the contest using a standard or randomized process. Any extra equipment will be removed from the team's supply box. Boxes must be completely closed and all equipment should remain inside the box until the start of the contest. Supply boxes are limited to the following dimensions: 40" x 24" X 40". If box is on wheels, the height of the wheels is not included in the dimensions. The contest committee may measure any and/or all boxes to determine compliance to size. If boxes are out of compliance, teams may be disqualified.

*An EMPTY tub for dirty dishes may be placed on top of equipment box.

*Pantry Ingredients – Each team may include in their equipment box the following “pantry” ingredients which they may use when preparing their dish if desired. There is no requirement to use these items, nor is it mandatory that teams include these in their supply box.

- Salt and Pepper
- Oils (up to 17 oz)
- 1 jar chicken bouillon
- 1 medium onion
- 2 cans vegetables AND/OR fruit (up to 16 oz) - team choice
- Rice (white or brown) OR pasta (up to 16 oz) - team choice
- Cornstarch (up to 1 lb) OR Flour (up to 1 lb) - team choice
- 3 dried herbs or spices of team's choice (any size)

Awards: Awards will be determined by the committee and are based on sponsorships. Mystery awards may also be given based on sponsorships and committee decision. The highest placing NM 4-H senior team for both NMSF and SNMSF food challenge contest, will advance to the National 4-H Food Challenge Contest.

Participants with disabilities: Any competitor who requires auxiliary aids, special accommodations or has food allergies must contact the State 4-H Office at least two weeks prior to the competition.

SUPPLY BOX CHECK LIST

(Supply boxes are limited to the following dimensions: 40" x 24" X 40")

Each team will bring an equipment box containing only one each of the following items, unless a different quantity is noted.

REMEMBER: Senior teams will have a heat source. Novice and Junior teams will not have a heat source:

Bench Scraper
Bowls (up to 4 – any size)
Can opener
Colander
Cookie Cutters (up to 2 – team choice)
Cutting boards (up to 4)
Disposable tasting spoons (no limit)
Dry measuring cups (1 set)
Electric skillet *Seniors only*
Extension cord (multiple outlet or strip style) *Seniors only*
First aid kit
Food Thermometer
Fork
Gloves
Grater
Hand sanitizer
Hot pads (up to 5)
Hot plate (ELECTRIC only - single or double burner) *Seniors only*
Kitchen shears (1 pair)
Kitchen timer
Knives (up to 6)
Liquid measuring cup
Measuring spoons (1 set)
Meat Tenderizer

Non-stick cooking spray
Note cards (no larger than 5 x 7; must be blank)
Pancake turner (2)
Paper towels (1 roll)
Pencils (no limit)
Plastic box and/or trash bag for dirty supplies
Pot with lid *Seniors only*
Potato masher
Potato peeler
Rolling pin
Sanitizing wipes
Serving dishes/utensils:
• 1 plate/platter
• 1 bowl
• 1 utensil
Skewers (1 package – wood or metal)
Skillet with lid *Seniors only*
Spatula (up to 2)
Stirring spoon
Storage bags (no limit)
Tongs (2 sets)
Toothpicks (no limit)
Whisk

***NEW* Supply Box Pantry Items**

Each team may include the following items in their supply box to be used during the contest.

- Salt (any size)
- Pepper (any size)
- 1 onion, unpeeled
- Oil (up to 17 oz)
- Cornstarch (up to 1 lb) **OR** Flour (up to 1 lb) (team choice)
- 1 jar chicken bouillon **OR** broth (up to 14.5 oz)
- Rice* (white or brown) **OR** pasta* (up to 16 oz) (team choice) *must be uncooked/dried
- 2 cans (up to 16 oz) vegetables **AND/OR** fruit (team choice)
- 3 dried herbs or spices of team's choice (any size)

New Mexico 4-H Food Challenge Rules of Play



Contest Procedures:

1. An orientation will be provided for all participants.
2. Each team will be directed to a cooking/preparation station (one table). There will be a “key” ingredient at each station. No ingredient amounts, recipe, or instructions will be provided at the station. The “key” ingredient will be representative of the category to which the team has been assigned.
3. With the “key” ingredient provided, along with access to a “grocery store” of additional ingredients, each team will have 40 minutes to plan and prepare a dish, plan a presentation, and clean up their assigned preparation area. No cost analysis will be required.
4. 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 will be notified of this amount during orientation. The items provided in the will be typical of what one can find in a store such as produce, canned goods, crackers, dairy products, etc. Teams should not create side, multiple dishes, and/or drinks with their ingredients or “grocery store” items. No cost analysis will be required for the contest.
5. Teams should prepare and present one entire dish/ recipe, as well as one individual serving for the judges. Plate and utensils for the individual serving will be provided by contest officials. Teams will be responsible for determining the total number of servings their dish provides and convey this to judges.
6. Educational resources will be provided to teams during the preparation phase of the contest. No other educational resources are allowed at the contest. The resources provided include:
 - MyPlate Mini Poster
 - Fight Bac – Fight Foodborne Bacteria Brochure
 - Know Your Nutrients
 - Food & Kitchen Safety Fact Sheet
 - Dietary Guideline Key points
7. Teams will be evaluated by judges during the preparation phase of the contest on teamwork, safety concerns and practices, preparation, and management. Descriptions of each element can be found on the National 4-H Food Challenge Preparation Scorecard.
8. Only participants and contest officials will be allowed in the food preparation area; however, spectators may watch from assigned areas.
9. Contest officials are not responsible for any equipment malfunctions the team may experience during the preparation period.
10. Teams should plan to not have access to a kitchen facility; therefore, dirty dishes should be placed in a plastic container, bag, or box to be cleaned following the contest.

11. 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.

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.

12. 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, and serving size information of the dish prepared. 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. Teams should refer to the National 4-H Food Challenge Presentation Scorecard for more details about the scoring of the team presentation.

13. Judges may taste the teams' dish at their personal discretion.

14. Following the team presentation, the judges may ask questions of the team, which will be considered by the judges when scoring the overall presentation.

4-H FOOD CHALLENGE WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to be used to prepare for Food Challenge contests. This worksheet may be utilized as a resource at county, district, or contests; however, will not be used at the state 4-H contest.

Knowledge Of MyPlate		
Ingredient	MyPlate Group	Number of Servings Needed Each Day

Knowledge Of Dietary Guidelines	
Key Message of Dietary Guidelines	How Does This Message Align with Your Dish?

Nutrition Knowledge		
Ingredient & Healthy Substitution	Key Nutrient(s)	Nutrient Function, Benefit, & Deficiency Risks

Food Preparation	
Steps In Preparation	What was Performed in This Step and Why is This Step Important?
Main Ingredient in Dish	What Is the Role of This Main Ingredient?

Food Safety (List Any Food Safety Concerns Associated with The Dish and/or Specific Ingredients)	

Serving Size Information	
How Many Total Servings Are in Dish?	What Is the Serving Size for One Person?

Additional Information (List Any Additional Information You Think is Important)	

4-H FOOD CHALLENGE SCORECARD – PRESENTATION

Team Name: _____

Team #: _____

Entry Category: ___ Appetizer ___ Main Dish ___ Side Dish ___ Healthy Dessert

Team Presentation	Comments	Points	Score
Knowledge of MyPlate and Dietary Guidelines:			
Knowledge of MyPlate		5	
Knowledge of Dietary Guidelines for Americans		5	
Nutrition Knowledge:			
Knows key nutrition in prepared dish		6	
Knowledge of nutrient functions, effects, and deficiency risks		6	
Healthy substitutions and modifications		3	
Food Preparation:			
Explained key steps in how dish was prepared		4	
Role of main ingredients in dish		2	
Safety Concerns and Practices:			
Explained food safety according to Fight BAC		8	
Serving Size Information:			
Demonstrated knowledge of serving size for prepared dish		4	
Food Appearance/Quality:			
Food is appealing and appetizing		3	
Appeared to be cooked properly		3	
Attractive and appropriate garnish		2	
Creativity:			
Used ingredients in a creative way		5	
Incorporated grocery store items into dish or garnish		3	
Effectiveness of Communication:			
Displayed effective communication skills		6	
Poise and personal appearance		4	
Questions:			
Accurately and appropriately answered questions		6	
Additional Comments:		Total Points (75)	

4-H FOOD CHALLENGE SCORECARD - PREPARATION

Team Name: _____

Team #: _____

Entry Category: _____ Appetizer _____ Main Dish _____ Side Dish _____ Healthy Dessert

Team Observation	Comments	Points	Score
Teamwork:			
Effective use of communication among team members		2	
Each team member played a key role in the preparation phase, whether cooking or preparing presentation		3	
Safety concerns and practices:			
Exhibited knowledge of how to use equipment safely (heat, utensils, sharps, etc.)		3	
Handled ingredients appropriately to avoid cross contamination		3	
Personal Hygiene (hair, nails, jewelry, etc.)		3	
Preparation:			
Practiced correct cooking procedures based upon ingredients provided		3	
Completed tasks efficiently and in a logical order		2	
Management:			
Used workspace efficiently		2	
Effective use of time		2	
Preparation table was clean at the conclusion of the preparation period		2	
Additional Comments: (based on observation)		Total Points (25)	

Judges Initials