



CULINARY COMPETITION

2025 Contest Rules

Eligibility

The AHF National Culinary Competition is open to all AHF operator members regularly employed at their facility.

Members and member facilities of the Culinary Competition Planning Committee are not eligible to compete.

The team may consist of any **TWO** of the following members:

- Chef, Dietitian, or Dietary Manager
- Student, Intern, Staff Member, Manager, Director, or System-Level Director
- Senior Leader or Staff Member from the Dietitian Team
- Senior Leader or Staff Member from the Foodservice Team
- Senior Leader or Staff Member from the Culinary Team

The Challenge

Develop an original recipe using at least three ingredients from two distinct Market Baskets, curated by the Culinary Competition Committee. You may use additional ingredients as needed to create six portions. Each portion must adhere to the cost and nutrition guidelines outlined below.

Food Cost

Raw food cost must not exceed \$8 per portion. The raw food cost includes all ingredients for the center of plate, sides, sauces, and garnishes.

Nutritional Guidelines

One portion of the recipe, with all ingredients, must not exceed these nutritional guidelines.

- Maximum of 700 calories
- Less than 23 grams of fat (maximum of 30% of total calories)
- Less than 750mg of sodium

Market Baskets

Select a minimum of three ingredients from the two Market Baskets (you may choose more if desired):

- Choose at least one ingredient from Market Basket A.
- Choose at least two ingredients from Market Basket B.

Be intentional with your selections. All recipes must comply with the food cost and nutritional guidelines outlined above.

Enter the Competition

Each entry must include:

- AHF Culinary Competition registration form: **[AHFConference.org/AHF-National-Culinary-Competition](https://www.a-h-f.org/AHF-National-Culinary-Competition)**
- Original recipes written in AHF format* for entrées, side dishes, sauces, and garnishes. Recipes must use two classic knife cuts and two classic cooking methods.
- Raw food cost for one portion
- Nutritional analysis of one portion
- Color photo of finished dish on a white plate showing all components
- (2) Classic Knife cuts and (2) cooking methods
- A list of special cookware and/or appliances used to produce the recipe beyond standard equipment provided for the competition (the standard equipment list is available on the resource page of the website)

Deadlines

All entries must be received at the AHF office by **March 30, 2025**. Use the AHF online submission portal for entries.

Email any questions to:

culinary@healthcarefoodservice.org

*AHF recipe format is the last page of this packet.

Finalists Selection

All entries are evaluated anonymously by the Culinary Competition Committee and five finalists are selected to compete at the AHF National Conference Culinary Competition.

Finalists are selected based on the entry criteria listed above and:

- Originality and innovation
- Creativity in Market Basket utilization
- Applicability to healthcare foodservice, senior dining and hospitality
- Appealing use of color and texture
- Overall plate presentation

If chosen as a finalist, only one team per organization will be selected to compete.

If selected as a finalist, you will be required to submit a 60-second promotional video filmed in 4K. We recommend reaching out to your organization's PR or marketing team for assistance with this video. The video will be used to announce finalists once all teams have been confirmed. Full details will be provided in your selection letter if chosen as a finalist.

Each finalist receives the following:

- Complimentary conference registration.
- \$650 travel stipend per team member. This stipend may be used for eligible travel expenses, including airfare (original ticket cost and associated taxes/fees only), mileage reimbursement (based on IRS rates), ground transportation, and the cost of conference hotel room and tax. Additional travel-related costs beyond \$650 are the responsibility of the competitor.
- Selected finalists may not combine Culinary Competition scholarships or stipends with any other AHF scholarships or stipends to attend Conference.

Finalists will be selected by June and must register for the conference as soon as possible. In the event that a selected finalist is unable to attend, travel and registration scholarship is transferable to another member of the site's team that will be competing in place of the original selected finalist. The Culinary Competition will be held on Friday, August 22, 2025 during the 2025 AHF National Conference at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Program rules subject to change based on capacity and public health restrictions.*

Culinary Competition Rules

Competition Ingredients

- All Market Basket ingredients will be provided by AHF. Teams will need to shop locally for any additional ingredients they require. Additional information will be provided in your selection letter if chosen to compete.
- Only the additional ingredients approved in the finalist's original entry submission can be used.
- Finalist teams will be assigned a mandatory Mystery Ingredient at the pre-competition briefing. The Mystery Ingredient must be incorporated into their dish. Judges will score 5 points for originality and creative uses of the Mystery Ingredient.
- Each team will have 1 hour to gather their Market Basket ingredients and Mystery Ingredient following the pre-competition briefing and to organize their speedrack.

Competition Equipment

- AHF provides two (2) induction burners per finalist team and assorted smallwares. A comprehensive equipment list will be provided to each finalist team.
- Teams may use additional cookware, kitchen tools and appliances (power maximum is 120V) to prepare their recipe. Additional equipment must be submitted with the initial entry. Additional

equipment will be reviewed and approved or denied by the Culinary Competition Committee

- Only the additional equipment approved in the finalist's original entry submission can be used.
- No additional plug in heat sources will be permitted. This includes but is not limited to toaster ovens, electric pressure cookers, sous vide cookers, etc.
- Additional equipment must be provided by finalists and will be their sole responsibility. AHF will not be held responsible for providing, damage to/of and loss of any equipment or materials.

Competition Pre-Work

- Finalist teams must submit a bio for each contestant in less than 250 words. Please summarize career highlights leading to the culinary competition event.
- Finalist teams will be required to submit a 60-second promotional video filmed in 4K that will be used to announce finalists once all teams have been confirmed.
- Finalists teams will be required to submit a short video introducing their team and their dish that will be played during the Culinary Competition. Deadlines and details will be sent out to selected finalists.



Culinary Competition Rules cont.

- Finalist teams must submit a hi-resolution headshot of each team member (JPEG/300 DPI format). Photos must be portrait/vertical format and have a neutral background. Contestants must wear a chef coat or lab coat and photos must show most of the body (minimum waist up).
 - All finalists must attend a mandatory briefing held before the competition. Start times for each team will be determined via a draw of numbers during the briefing. The briefing will be held on-site at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans on Thursday, August 21, 2025.
 - Competitors may choose between a standard dinner plate or an entrée bowl for their dish presentation. Please indicate your preference in the application. AHF will provide the selected option based on your request.
 - Finished plates will not be presented to judges until the team's 75 minutes have expired. If plates are not complete at the end of time, they will be presented to judges "as is" for scoring.
 - Culinary Competition staff and committee volunteers will assist in delivering plates to the judges.
 - All teams must clean their workstations. AHF will plan for access to a sanitation area and materials.
 - Following the competition, each team will have the opportunity for a critique and debriefing with AHF's panel of expert judges.
- Finalists must wear a chef hat provided by AHF and professional chef coat. Black or black/white checkered pants and foodservice safety shoes are required and must be provided by the finalists. Athletic shoes are not allowed.
 - Finalist teams will have 75 minutes to complete and create plates for the judging panel and display. Plates may not be presented to the judges early.

The Competition

Judging

The judging panel will consist of six industry leaders, including at least one past gold medalist and a safety and sanitation judge. The panel will be comprised of individuals who bring valuable expertise in areas such as industry trends, cultural and regional relevance, and more, offering insightful critiques to elevate the competition. There is a 100 point scoring scale as follows:

ORGANIZATION: Maximum of 15 points

Cleanliness, organization, work flow, sanitation / HACCP, time management, preparation, and teamwork will all be evaluated.

Sanitation, in particular, will be closely monitored, as it is equally important in this setting as in our operations.

CULINARY SKILLS: Maximum of 35 points

Knife skills, cooking techniques, proper use of equipment, recipe compliance, and proper food handling.

TASTE & PRESENTATION: Maximum of 45 points

Originality, ingredient compatibility, use of color, consistent portion size, plating technique, garnishing, product doneness, texture, taste, seasoning, and overall appeal.

The competition aims to elevate healthcare foodservice, senior dining, and hospitality by showcasing creativity and culinary excellence.

MYSTERY INGREDIENT: Maximum of 5 points

Originality and creative use of mystery item

Prizes

First, second, and third place AHF prizes will be awarded based on total points:

FIRST PLACE: Engraved Plates and AHF Culinary Competition Gold Medals; (2) \$300 Gift Cards

SECOND PLACE: AHF Culinary Competition Silver Medals; (2) \$200 Gift Cards

THIRD PLACE: AHF Culinary Competition Bronze Medals; (2) \$100 Gift Cards

Medals will be presented during the conference. All winners will be announced on the AHF website, through press releases and featured in S.O. Connected.

EXCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITY FOR COMPETITORS:
All teams will have the opportunity to receive feedback and advice in a private debriefing following the competition from our expert panel of judges.



Market Baskets

Market Basket A

Must select at least one ingredient from Market Basket A – Choice of Protein:

- Andouille Sausage
- Crab
- Pork (Loin, Chops, or Ground)
- King Trumpet / Oyster Mushrooms

Market Basket B

Must select at least two ingredients from Market Basket B – Choose From:

- The Trinity (bell peppers, celery, & onion)*
**Must be used together*
- Collards
- Corn-on-the-Cob
- Eggplant
- Okra
- Sweet Potatoes
- Red Beans (canned or dried*)
**If using dried beans, teams may check them for rocks and set them to soak during the orientation the night before. Beans may not be handled again until the 1-hour prep on competition day, when they may be drained. Soak time will be approximately 24 hours, refrigerated.*
- Pecans
- Basmati Rice

+ 1 Mystery ingredient - To be revealed at the Pre-Competition Orientation on Thursday, August 22, 2025.

Other

All recipes entered for the Culinary Competition become the property of AHF. By entering, contestants grant permission to AHF and the Culinary Competition sponsors to publish and/or use in any way the materials submitted, including the recipes, names, and photos of the competitors.

Permission to use copyrighted materials, symbols, etc. must be verified with a copy of the permission from the copyright owner.

AHF, the Culinary Competition, nor sponsors shall be liable or responsible for personal, healthcare institution, or company equipment that is lost, stolen, or broken.

In the event of a power loss, the team will be given a set designated time to complete their work. A member of the committee will keep time to ensure lost time is compensated.

Approved Recipe Format

Final recipes should be proofed and formatted before submitting. Each recipe should be submitted using the below format. Recipe submissions should be written based on 6 portions.

Recipe Name: _____

Recipe Description: _____

Full Recipe:

- Prep Time: _____
- Cook Time: _____
- Yield*: _____

Component 1 Name

2 tsp. No Salt Sodium-Free Salt

1 tsp. Garlic Powder

METHOD OF PREPARATION:

In a bowl, combine all ingredients until evenly mixed.

Component 2 Name

1 batch Spaetzle Dumplings

2 oz. Bacon slices

METHOD OF PREPARATION:

Place the bacon in a large deep skillet on medium-high heat. Fry until the bacon is browned and crisp, turning as needed. Remove from pan and set aside.

To Plate and Serve:

1. _____
2. _____