

# The 36<sup>th</sup> Annual IFTSA and Mars Wrigley Product Development Competition RULES AND GUIDELINES

## BACKGROUND

The 36<sup>th</sup> Annual IFTSA and Mars Product Development Competition is a chance for students to take the skills and knowledge learned in school and apply them to a real-world situation. Each participating school's team develops a new food idea and carries the concept through marketing and production, much like a commercial product development team. This is an opportunity for any student to get involved in food science and IFTSA. It promotes organization, teamwork, creativity, and scientific skills.

## PURPOSE

1. Empower students to apply scientific knowledge and creativity toward building a more innovative and sustainable food system.
2. Enable students to build the technical and professional skills needed to thrive in and contribute to the evolving food industry.
3. Provide opportunities for students to practice effective science communication for both expert and general audiences, strengthening the link between research, innovation, and real-world impact.
4. Encourage creativity, collaboration, and innovation throughout all stages of product development - from creation to marketing.

## SPONSOR

Mars Wrigley

## SCHEDULE

Date	Event
February 1, 2026	Preliminary application deadline
March 2, 2026	Finalists notified
May 1, 2026	Finalist proposals due
July 12 - July 15, 2026	IFT FIRST in Chicago

## GENERAL COMPETITION RULES

1. Entries must consist of a proposal for a new food product. Judges will be evaluating the potential success of product entries in today's market and technical problem-solving skills used in product development. Teams may not enter their product in competitions outside of IFT.
2. Teams may not enter their product in more than one IFTSA competition. Teams may submit different products to multiple IFTSA product development competitions for the preliminary rounds. However, if a team is selected as a finalist in more than one competition, they may only compete in one (1) final round and must choose which competition to proceed with.
3. To control the emphasis and fairness of the competition, the following limitations will be enforced:
  - a. Judges will not award extra points for the size of sensory panels or source of panelists. The purpose of this rule is to eliminate the possibility of teams earning extra points for their ability to collect more sensory data due to a larger number of team members. Rather, teams will be judged on how they went about gaining insights about the approval of their product from their potential consumers
  - b. Since the focus of this competition is on food science skills in product development, judges will not give points for the quality of package graphics or other advertising material.
4. All written proposals must be submitted via the submission portal on IFT.org in both .doc and .pdf format to the competition chair by the deadline.

## ELIGIBILITY

1. Each team member must hold Student Member status in the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) at the time of the submission of the preliminary report.
2. Teams must have at least three (3) and no more than ten (10) members.
3. All team members must be enrolled at the same university.
4. Each team member must be registered as a student at the university they represent during the semester before the competition. If participating in the finals at IFT FIRST, the student need not be currently enrolled.
5. Teams may consist of undergraduate students, graduate students, or a combination thereof. One (1) member shall be elected team captain and retain that position throughout the competition for communications. Captains may change between the preliminary and final competitions.
6. Each university may only submit one (1) entry (team) per year.
7. Entries must be the students' work. Professors may be consulted and referenced but may not be a major contributor to the actual work.
8. Industry support such as donation of ingredients or use of equipment is allowed and encouraged but should not be acknowledged by any team in the preliminary or final proposal, oral presentation, or product tasting sessions. (Penalties will apply if a violation occurs.)

9. Projects from product development classes are eligible in the competition.
10. MS, Ph.D., summer internship, research, or other such projects are not eligible in the competition.
11. The Chair of the competition and VP of Competitions will be excluded from participating in any team competition during the year of their service.
12. Members of the most recent first place team of this competition are not eligible to compete in this competition. Members are encouraged to compete in another IFTSA competition.

## PRELIMINARY ROUND PROCEDURES

### Application

Teams must submit their application via the submission portal on IFT.org by February 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:59 p.m. CST (Chicago Time UTC-6). Applications received after February 1<sup>st</sup> will not be accepted.

Submissions include (but are not limited to): Proposal (both Word and PDF format), IFT membership numbers, and advisor letter. Please start your submission early to ensure you have all necessary information.

### Preliminary Written Proposal

1. The preliminary proposal may not exceed eight (8) pages; including the title page, Body, and the appendix page (process flow diagram, pictures, etc). Penalties will apply if a violation occurs.
  - a. Page 1: Title
  - b. Pages 2-7: Body
  - c. Page 8: Appendix
  - d. Additional page(s): references in *Journal of Food Science* format
2. The report must be typed double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font. All text and figures must be on 8.5" × 11.0" paper with 1" margins.
3. The title page should include the title of the report and date. No university affiliation or student names should be included on the title page. Include a 5" × 7" color photograph of the proposed product in the preliminary proposal.
4. Names of sponsor companies, any university, students, or other indication of team location are not acceptable in the preliminary proposals.
5. References: All references cited within the proposal must follow the *Journal of Food Science* formatting. The list of references (which are not included in the eight-page limit) must be submitted as separate .doc and PDF documents with the preliminary proposal. If a problem arises with reference credibility, a judge may contact the competition chair for verification.
6. A separate cover letter from the Department Head or a professor, verifying the originality of work and the team's compliance with the competition rules, is to be submitted as a

separate PDF document with the preliminary proposal. The standard format for the certificate of originality may be obtained from [ift.org](http://ift.org).

## Judging

1. Each submission will be reviewed by at least three (3) judges, at least one of which will be from Mars Wrigley.
2. Each entry will be scored based on 100 points, with the points to be distributed as shown in the rubric.
3. Judges will select a maximum of six (6) finalists.
4. All competing teams will be informed of only their respective scores and judges' comments. Each judge will provide 1-2 sentences of feedback at a minimum.
5. The finalists will be selected as follows by the judges and the Chair
  - a. All point scores are converted into rank scores (highest score out of 100=1, second highest score out of 100=2, etc.).
  - b. Rank scores are totaled for each team (one rank score per judge).
  - c. The lowest six (6) rank scores are designated as the finalists.
  - d. In the event of a tie, the two (2) lowest rank scores will be added for each group, and the team with the lowest score will advance. If this fails, the judges will be asked to decide.
6. Finalists will be notified of their status by March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

## FINAL ROUND PROCEDURES

Responsibilities of finalists include the preparation of a final written proposal, an oral presentation, and samples of their product tasting defense for the five (5) judges and competition chair.

## Application

Finalists must submit their final proposal, in both Word and PDF formats, via the submission portal on [IFT.org](http://IFT.org) by May 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:59 p.m. CST. Proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted.

## Final Written Proposal

1. The maximum number of pages for the final written proposal is twenty-five (25). This number does include all portions of the document, including but not limited to title page, photograph page, proposal body text, process flow diagram, references, and appendices.
2. The proposal must be typed, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font. All text and figures must be on 8.5 × 11.0" white paper with 1" margins.

3. The title page, for which there is no specific required format, must include the title of the proposal and date.
4. Include a 5" × 7" color photograph in the final written proposal. Additional images throughout the report are optional.
5. References should be added at the end of the proposal and must be in the *Journal of Food Science* format and are not included in the page limit.
6. Teams' anonymity is no longer required.

### Oral Presentation

1. For the components taking place at IFT FIRST, please note the following: the oral presentations are meant to be more of an overview where you "sell" the product while the defense or tasting session is technical. You should still include some technical aspects in the oral presentation but save the details for the defense/tasting.
2. Finalists will present a fifteen (15) minute oral report followed by a fifteen (15) minute question/answer period. This presentation should give an overview of what the product is, why it is desirable, and how it was developed. This is your chance to showcase the entire product development journey and the work your team has done. All areas of the written proposal should be addressed. The audience will include: three (3) Mars Wrigley judges, at least two (2) additional judges, and the invited public from the conference: peers, industry, and conference visitors.
3. The presentations will be open to the public; however, only judges may ask questions.
4. At least three team (3) members will present the report; additional team members may also present. Teams will be judged on how the whole team is used; judges are looking to see how each member contributed to the product.
5. A PowerPoint presentation is required. The Chair will provide finalists with details concerning the PowerPoint presentation (format, version, file size, etc.).
6. Time limits will be enforced. The Chair will keep track of time.
7. The oral presentation should include the product and process description clearly explained as well as the major technical difficulties. Other areas should include safety/shelf life, originality, economic feasibility, marketing, and sustainability. This portion will be judged on quality, organization, communication, interest generated, and selling the product idea to fellow food technologists.

### Product Sampling and Defense

1. Each team will defend its product concept individually before the panel of judges. During the defense, the team will present their product to the judges for tasting, and the judges will have an opportunity to ask in-depth technical questions. Preliminary feedback will be given to each team after product samples are complete. Judges will not know the final scores or winners and will provide constructive feedback to each team.
2. Each team is allotted twenty-five (25) minutes for the guided tasting session. Teams must begin with a brief reintroduction of their product to the judges, followed by an in-



depth discussion and Q&A addressing the product's technical aspects and formulation. Audio-visual equipment will not be available.

3. The goal of the tasting session will be for the judges to engage in a technical dialogue with the team about their product.
4. Be sure to provide enough product for five judges and the IFTSA student representative to sample.
5. Your product must be prepared beforehand and brought to the event; a prep table will be made available to stage product.
6. Teams are solely responsible for their products (delivery, storage) at the event. Please notify the Chair to request special storage conditions by May 1<sup>st</sup>, IFT will make reasonable accommodation. IFTSA and IFT are not responsible for lost products.
7. All microbiologically sensitive products should be tested and properly prepared before consumption to avoid food safety issues. This should be reviewed in your paper after discussions with your food microbiology professors. Be prepared to answer questions and discuss results regarding the microbiological safety of the product being shared.

\*Delivery vs. Promise: The "promise" is the product that the team orally communicates to the judges through the written report, oral report, and photograph. The "delivery" is the product produced and presented to the judges for tasting.

## Judging

Final proposals will be scored based on **300** points.

1. At least three (3) judges will be chosen from industry or academia, with practical product development experience.
2. Up to three (3) judges will be appointed by the sponsor whenever possible.
3. Judge identities will remain anonymous until the final competition.
4. Judges are required to evaluate products by point totals, not personal preferences.

## Tips from the Judges

1. It is recommended that teams consult or have a member on their team with packaging and engineering experience on types of packaging and how to bring a product of quality to the market shelves.
2. Use your whole team. Judges want to see teamwork in play and how members contributed to the product.
3. Use your resources; consult your professors, ask for guidance. This competition is about bringing a product from an idea to market.
4. Create a strong and accurate business case with key financial breakdowns. Do not "guess" the price. An important key to formulating something and bringing it up to scale is knowing the cost and knowing if the market would pay that amount.



## **AWARDS**

1. A max of six (6) teams will make it to the finals. The teams will all be judged against one another in the finals.
2. Each finalist team will receive a travel and registration reimbursement of up to \$1,800.
3. The 1st place winner will receive \$3,000, the 2nd place winner will receive \$1,500, and the 3rd place winner will receive \$500.

## **NOTES**

- Competitors are expected to participate in the IFTSA Product Show & Taste prior to the Closing Ceremony and are expected to present their products to attendees as an integral part of the competition experience.
- Copyright and trademark violations will not be tolerated. Teams that submit a product that features a character or franchise which they do not have explicit rights will be disqualified.
- Patent rights belong to the individual teams and will be handled according to the university patent policies. IFT, IFTSA, and Mars Wrigley do not claim any responsibility or rights for product development ideas presented in this competition.
- Mars Wrigley, IFT, and IFTSA are not responsible for any complications that may result from product sampling throughout product development to final presentation at the competition. Entry into this competition implies the release of Mars Wrigley, IFT, and IFTSA from any liability for damages incurred because of this competition.
- Any team or team member that does not follow the IFT Event Code of Conduct will risk being disqualified.

## **QUESTIONS**

Please contact the IFTSA Mars Competition Chair via email at [iftsa.pdc@gmail.com](mailto:iftsa.pdc@gmail.com).

## **Challenges and Penalties**

Challenges based on rule infractions during oral presentations must be made immediately after the presentation, and no later than the finalization of scores. It is the duty of the Chair to ensure that infractions in written proposals and product tastings are noted. Scores should be considered finalized by one (1) hour prior to start of the IFTSA Closing Ceremony. No challenges will be entertained once this time has passed.

Challenges must be referred to the Chair and/or VP of Competitions. The Chair will refer challenges to the VP of Competitions, IFTSA Office of the President, and IFTSA Staff Liaison. It is the necessary duty that all Competition Chairs, VP of Competition, and IFTSA Office of the President report any infractions they receive or notice during competition. Final decisions on challenges, penalties, and IFT Code of Conduct will be made by the IFTSA Staff Liaison and disseminated to necessary parties. This may include input from judges.