

IFTSA Smart Snacks for Kids Product Development Competition RULES AND GUIDELINES

BACKGROUND

The IFTSA Smart Snacks for Kids (SSFK) Competition challenges students to develop a fun and nutritious food or beverage product targeted at kids and/or teens. Products must abide by the USDA “Guide to Smart Snacks in School” recommendations.

Teams are empowered to use their imagination in the science and overall appeal in the creation of a novel product. A crucial component of a winning product is the team’s ability to relay the food or beverage “smart” qualities to both a technical and general audience.

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.

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. Products must abide by the USDA “Guide to Smart Snacks in Schools” recommendations (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks-school>)
 - a. A weight-by-weight breakdown of ingredients in the product must be listed in the proposal.
 - b. If the product is made with a healthy exemption listed in the guidelines, the exemption must be noted in the proposal.
 - c. Use of the <https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/calculator/> calculator is highly recommended, and a screen shot may be included.
2. Teams may not enter their product in more than one IFTSA competition. Teams may not enter their product in competitions outside of IFT.
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/ age of panelists. This rule eliminates the possibility of teams earning extra points for collecting more sensory data due to school size or geographic location. Teams working in an online virtual format will not be penalized for a lack of sensory data.
 - b. Since the focus of this competition is on food science skills in product development, judges will not award points for the quality of graphics on packaging or other advertising materials.
4. All written proposals must be submitted via the submission portal on IFT.org in both .doc and .pdf format to the 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 two (2) and no more than five (5) 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 submit as many unique entries (teams) as they wish per year. Students may not be on more than one (1) team, and each submission must be unique to other entries.
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 1st at 11:59 p.m. CST (Chicago Time UTC-6). Applications received after February 1st 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 six (6) pages including the title page, body, and the appendix page for a (process flow diagram, pictures, etc). Penalties will apply if a violation occurs.
 - a. Page 1: Title
 - b. Pages 2-5: Body
 - c. Page 6: Appendix
 - d. Additional page(s): references in *Journal of Food Science* format
 - e. Appendix page examples can include but are not limited to:
 - i. FMSA/HACCP plan
 - ii. Process flow diagram
 - iii. Nutrition label
 - iv. SWOT analysis
 - v. Ingredient functionality table
 - vi. Packaging
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. There is no specific required format for the title page, though it should include the title and date of the proposal to be submitted. Names of students and universities should not be identified on the title page.
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.

Judging

1. Each submission will be reviewed by at least three (3) judges.
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 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 2nd.

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 Chair.

Application

Finalists must submit their final proposal, in both .doc and PDF formats, via the submission portal on IFT.org by May 1st at 11:59 pm 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 fifteen (15) pages, including the final proposal's body text, diagrams, figures, tables, and appendices. This limit does not include: one (1) title page and one (1) photograph and/or visual illustration page.
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. 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 page limit.
5. Teams' anonymity is no longer required.

Oral Presentation

1. The oral presentation should be targeted at the general public. Your presentation should focus on educating consumers on the information in your written proposal in a manner that generates understanding as well as excitement about your product. The presentation will be for the judges, but a live audience will be present.
2. Finalists will present a ten (10) minute live oral presentation followed by a ten (10) minute question/answer period. This presentation should give an overview of what the product is, why it is desirable, and how it was developed.
3. The presentations will be open to the public; however, only judges may ask questions.
4. At least two team (2) 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.

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 samplings 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 (5) 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 1st, IFT will make reasonable accommodations. 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. Each judge may serve up to three (3) years.
3. Judge identities will remain anonymous until the final competition.
4. Judges are required to evaluate products by point totals, not personal preferences.

AWARDS

1. A maximum 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 university patent policies. IFT and IFTSA do not claim any responsibility or rights for product development ideas presented in this competition.
- IFT and the 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 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 Smart Snacks for Kids Competition Chair via email at iftsa.ssfk@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.