

# SEIFT NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026

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## Upcoming!

### IFT FIRST

July 12-15, 2026

## Well-being Meets Indulgence



**South Eastern Section**  
Institute of Food Technologists

*Follow us on all our socials:*

*Our official website*

*LinkedIn*

*Instagram*



# President's Message

Dear Southeastern Section members,

Thank you for your commitment and hard work. I truly appreciate your support.

The Southeastern IFT (SEIFT) organized a Coca-Cola Tour and Panel focused on Beverage Innovation and Career Pathways on October 22, 2025, where attendees learned from Coca-Cola leaders about innovation and career opportunities in the food and beverage industry.

We also held a successful Supplier's Night and Food Expo on February 4, 2026, at the Cobb Convention Center in Atlanta, Georgia, themed "Well-Being Meets Indulgence." At the EXPO, we hosted the Students' Product Development Competition, awarding prizes to the top three student presenters. We also organized the Research Competition (3-Minute Thesis) for students to showcase their research. Excellence in Leadership and Achievement Awards were also presented to one undergraduate and one graduate student from each university.

Our educational segment featured Anuj Shanbhag from The Coca-Cola Company, who spoke on "The New Balance: Clean Label, Functional Benefits, and the Future of Indulgent Beverages," and Chef Ed Harris, winner of Food Network's Chopped, who presented on "Cooking with Purpose: Wellness, Sustainability, and Travel-Inspired Cuisine."

Additionally, Nicole Gallace, Founder and Talent Solutions Manager at Food Grads/Careers in Food presented a virtual

session titled "That's a Food Job!" focusing on careers in food and beverage. The night concluded with a reception, door prizes, and the announcement of student competition winners.

Thank you to the Board members for your dedication, which has made this year's events a success. Your commitment to our section and the food science community is invaluable.

For more updates and details:

- Please visit our [section's website](#)
- Follow us on
  - [Instagram](#) (South Eastern Section IFT)
  - [Facebook](#) (South Eastern Section IFT)
- Join our [LinkedIn Group](#) (Southeast IFT Section)

I look forward to your active participation in events and involvement in our section's activities



Kind Regards,  
Ogechukwu Tasie, PhD  
President, South Eastern IFT



# Meet the team!

## Executive Board for 2025-2026



Ogechukwu Tasie  
President  
Alabama A&M University



Adelia Bovell-Benjamin  
President-Elect & Suppliers Night  
Chair  
Tuskegee University



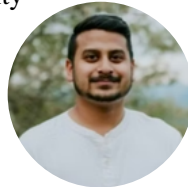
Alex Thompson  
Immediate Past-President  
Clemson Cooperative Extension



Sean Overstreet  
Secretary  
Tilley Distribution



Dr. Kevin Mis Solval  
Treasurer  
University of Georgia



Vick Patel  
Employment Chair  
Eurofins Microbiology



Dr. Sungeun Cho  
Membership Chair  
Auburn University



Dr. Martha Verghese  
Director At Large  
Alabama A&M University



Peter Gichuhi  
Director at Large  
Tuskegee University



Nedra Montgomery  
Student Competition Co-Chair  
Alabama A&M University



Vishal Manjunatha  
Director at Large/Student  
Competition Chair  
McKee Foods Corporation



Robina Rai  
Marketing Chair  
Clemson University



Dr. Christopher Kucha  
Director at Large  
University of Georgia



Queen Abbah  
Newsletter/Communications Chair  
Tuskegee University



Montreka Dansby  
Social Media Lead



Norma Dawkins  
Member at Large  
Tuskegee University



Feng Chen  
Member at Large  
Clemson University



Vanessa Njoku  
Director at Large  
Alabama A&M University



Viateur Ngabonzima  
Student Representative  
Tuskegee University



Gina Fimiano  
Student Representative  
University of Georgia



Tejasiri Thatipam  
Student Representative  
Alabama A&M  
University



Alex Gillespie  
Student Representative  
Clemson University



Vianca Maite Encalada  
Student Representative  
Auburn University

## Nominations Open for Section Officers!

### Executive Board for 2026-2027

#### President Elect

(1 year as President Elect, 1 year as President, 1 year as Past President)

Director at Large

Member at Large

Supplier Event Chair

Student Competition Chair

Student Competition Co-Chair

Employment Chair



Contact [seiftsection@gmail.com](mailto:seiftsection@gmail.com) or go [here!](#)

## New Members

Please join us in welcoming the following new members who joined SEIFT from September 2025 to March 2026.

We thank you for being a part of our section and look forward to meeting you in our upcoming events.

Sucharan Reddy Bandari

Yen Tran

Megan Fergusson

Simran James

Precious Leku Owan

Manideep Busarapu

Miranda Barr

Harleen Kaur

Alex Henderson

Che Yang

Maquasia Martin

Priyanka Dahiya

Aron Csuti

Aniyah Jones

Hilda Njogu

Naejea Piper

Prathista Johnson

Isis Portillo Romay

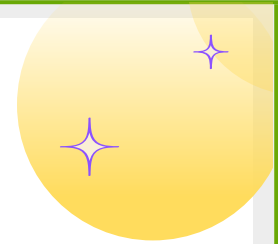
Cooper Moore

Loveth Ekedegba

Nilgun Efe

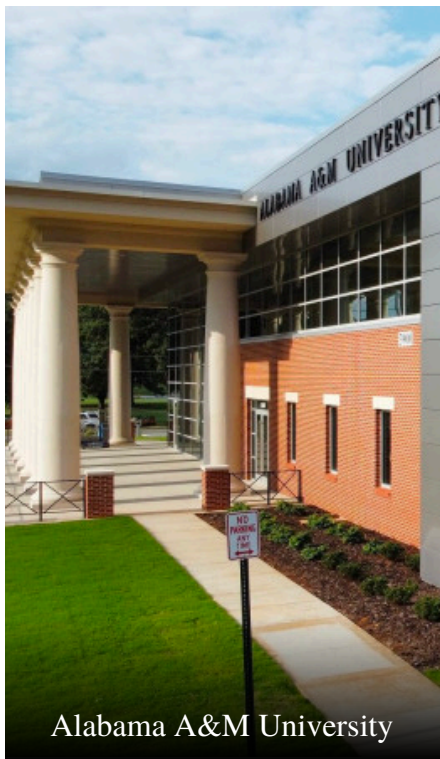
Amber Elias





# Congratulations Graduates!

SEIFT congratulates all the young food science professionals who graduated this spring!  
Keep attaining more giant strides and achieving your dreams!



Alabama A&M University



Tuskegee University



University of Georgia



Auburn University



Clemson University

We wish you the best for the future!



## Recap of Fall 2025/Spring 2026 Events

Last FALL, we had an amazing learning experience during the Coca-Cola Tour & Panel discussion at the Atlanta Facility.

It was a great insight into Beverage Innovation and career opportunities in the food and beverage industry. We sincerely appreciate Coca-Cola for this opportunity and everyone who participated in the tour.



The Annual Food Industry EXPO is one of the most anticipated event of the each year. 2026 Expo featured a variety of events, ranging form the Golf Outing, industry insights, trends, and Innovation, educational sessions featuring seasoned speakers, Networking Experience with industry professionals, student engagement sessions, and lots of fun activities, and a beautiful ambience at the Cobb Convention Center.



# Coca-Cola Tour (10.22.2025)



# Coca-Cola Women in STEM X Southeast IFT (10.22.2025)



**Tamanna Ramesh**  
Host & Moderator  
Director, Global Innovation Programs



**Vishal Manjunatha**  
Co-Host & Director-at-Large, SEIFT  
R&D Food Scientist, McKee Foods

## Panel #1: Careers at Coca-Cola: Internships, Early Careers, and Professional Experiences



**Tiffany Murdoc**  
Senior Director  
TI & SC Enterprise Capabilities



**Brenda Khor**  
Senior Manager  
College and University Marketing



**Tania Guignard**  
Senior Manager  
University Recruiting Program

## Panel #2: Driving Global Beverage Innovation through Science and Technology



**Arti Arora**  
Senior Vice President  
Global Scientific & Regulatory Affairs



**Ashaki Wilham**  
Senior Director  
Flavor Systems



**Cindy Pang**  
Senior Director  
AI Transformation @ The Coca-Cola



**2026 Golf Outing**  
**Dinner, networking, Golf Game, and Fun Activities**  
**February 03, 2026**



**South Eastern IFT Food Industry Expo (Atlanta, GA)**



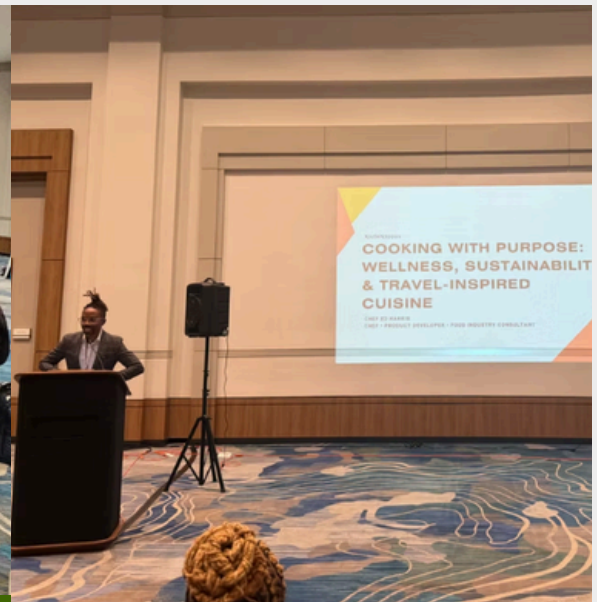
# Golf Outing (02.03.2026)



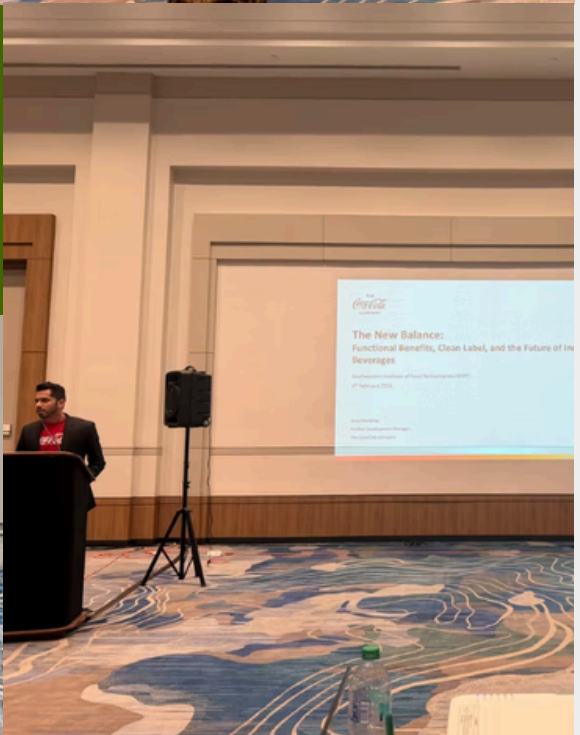


# Golf Outing (02.03.2026)





**Food Industry Expo  
(02.04.2026)  
Educational Insight Sessions**



# Well-being Meets Indulgence (02.04.2026)



*The New Balance: Clean Label, Functional Benefits, and the Future of Indulgent Beverages*

**Anuj Shanbhag**

Product Development Manager  
The Cola-Cola Company

*Cooking with Purpose: Wellness, Sustainability,  
and Travel-Inspired Cuisine*

**Chef Ed Harris**

Plant-Based Chef | Speaker | Product Developer|  
Restaurant Consultant|  
Iron Chef International Winner, Chopped Winner





# Food Industry Expo (02.04.2026)





**Food Industry Expo  
(02.04.2026)  
Door Prizes & Reception**





## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Opening Remark

9:30 – 10:30 am

**Product Development Competition**

10:30 – 11:30 am

**Research Competition: 3 Minute Thesis**

11:30 – 1:00 pm

**Educational & Insight Sessions**

*Well-Being meets Indulgence*

The New Balance: Clean Label, Functional Benefits, and the Future of Indulgent Beverages

Anuj Shanbhag, Product Development Manager, The Coca-Cola Company

*Cooking with Purpose: Wellness, Sustainability, and Travel-Inspired Cuisine*

Chef Ed Harris, Plant-Based Chef | Speaker | Product Developer | Restaurant Consultant | Iron Chef

International Winner, Chopped Winner

1:00 – 3:00 pm

Student Networking Events

1:00 – 6:00 pm

**EXPO HALL OPENS**

Exhibitors Check-in & Set Up from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

5:00 – 6:00 pm

Student Competition Winners Announced

Door Prizes | Reception (Food & Beverage)

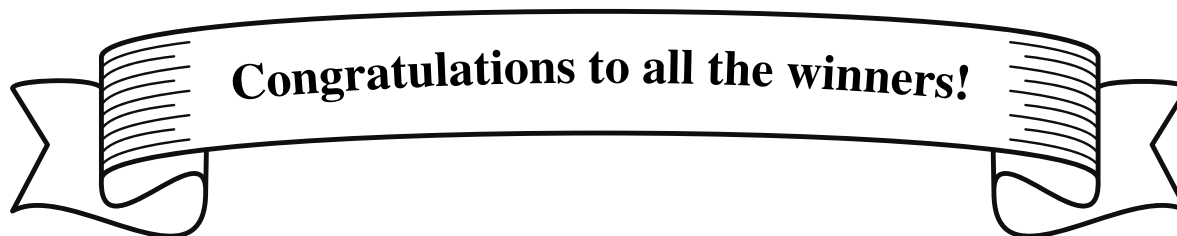


**South Eastern IFT 2026 Food Industry Expo**

# Product Development Competition

The 2026 Southeast IFT (SEIFT) product development competition challenged students to create food products that **balance indulgent taste with wellness and sustainability through clean labels and functional approaches.**

The main rule? New product must contain >51% nutrient-dense, clean-label ingredients (whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, or other minimally processed foods) by weight of the finished product. Product should also have functional benefits, supply at least 10% daily value nutrient, meet food labelling and regulatory criteria, project sustainable sourcing, production, and packaging solutions, and possess a balance of crave-worthy taste



## 1st Place

### S'Noreo Cups

Tuskegee University

Cayden Bowe (Team Lead), Nicole May,  
Temitope Olafuyi



## 2nd Place

### NextBite Sticks & Dip (Kimchi Flavored)

Alabama A&M University

Kaylah Bias (Team Lead), Ruth Fennell,  
Aniyah Jones, Lauryn Strong, Emille White



## 3rd Place

### Amaraquin Truffles

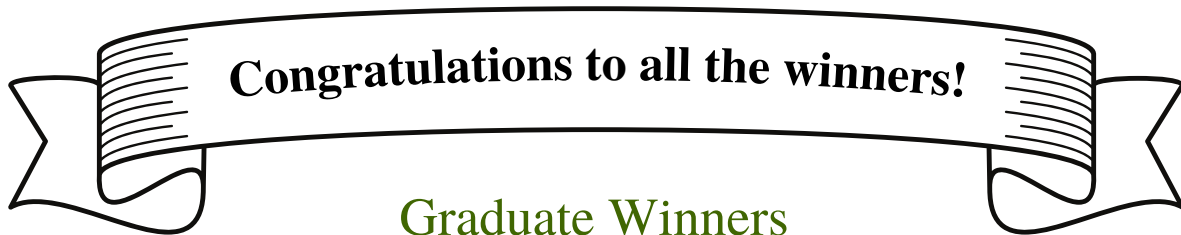
Alabama A&M University

Karyn Rose (Team Lead), Maria  
Martinez, Vanessa Njoku, Emily  
Amenyenu, Miguel Sanmartin



# 3M Thesis Research Poster Competition

Students from different universities had the opportunity of presenting their research to their peers and other professionals in food science and technology.



## Graduate Winners

### **1st Place**

**Gina Fimiano**

*Turning Salted, Dried Jellyfish into a Collagen Peptide Ingredient for Frozen Foods*  
University of Georgia

### **2nd Place**

**Robina Rai**

*Thinking Outside (and About) the Box: Turning Food Waste into Paperboard*  
Clemson University

### **3rd Place**

**Justin Daniel**

*Improving Postharvest Control in Organic Apple Storage*  
University of Georgia

## Undergraduate Winners

### **1st Place**

**Prathista J J Christadas**

*Functional and Antioxidant Potential of Adansonia digitata (Baobab) Powder*  
Alabama A&M University

### **2nd Place**

**Reginald Mack**

*Nourishing Neighborhoods: Innovative Paths to Healthier SNAP Communities*  
Clemson University

# Meet the judges!

## Product Development Competition & 3 Minute Thesis Competition



**Andy Gusmano**  
Sensient Flavors & Extracts



**Ed Harris**  
Restaurant Consulting Chef



**Nancy Harris**  
Quadra Group



**Chelsea Ramsey**  
Edlong Flavor Solutions



**Daniel Kennedy**  
Edlong Flavor Solutions



**Alicia Lay**  
Kalsec

# Faculty Award Recognition

## Institute of Food Technologists to Honor Top Achievements in Food Science at IFT FIRST Annual Event and Expo

On May 4, 2026, **Dr. Adedlia Bovell-Benjamin** received the **IFT Fellow Award** and will be inducted into the 2026 Class of IFT Fellows at the IFT FIRST Annual Event in July 2026.

This Award is the highest bestowed by IFT each year, recognizing the significant contributions of its recipients to the field of Food Science and the IFT body at large.



**Congratulations to Dr. Adelia Bovell-Benjamin!**

# Student Leadership Awards

## Graduate Student Leadership Awardees



**Kaleb Jackson**  
Alabama A&M University



**Robina Rai**  
Clemson University



**Vianca Tashiguano**  
Auburn University



**Viateur Ngabonzima**  
Tuskegee University



**Johana Lilian John Muthiah**  
University of Georgia

## Undergraduate Student Leadership Awardees



**Kristian Gooden**  
Alabama A&M  
University



**Che "Sasho" Yang**  
University of Georgia



**Cayden Bowe**  
Tuskegee University


# So what's next?

## Upcoming 2026 Events

# IFT : first

ANNUAL EVENT AND EXPO


 **July 12 - 15, 2026**


 McCormick Place, Chicago, IL


## Registration for IFT FIRST is Now Open!




**Register Today!**  
[www.iftevent.org](http://www.iftevent.org)

 **Global Community**  
Connect with thousands of professionals

 **Innovative Solutions**  
Discover the latest research and trends

 **Sustainable Future**  
Advancing a healthier world through food

 **Meaningful Connections**  
Build partnerships that make an impact

*Be on the lookout! More updates to come!*



## Got research to share?



Share your research work with us and we'll highlight it in our newsletter as well as socials. We know your work is important and we believe it needs to be known!

## Share more?

Job postings, achievements, career highlights or more – Use this Newsletter to share and connect with other food professionals in your section!



## Corporate Sponsorship

South Eastern IFT invites you to become a corporate sponsor for our section's upcoming events in 2026 and beyond, thereby supporting the larger community of food professionals in your local region. Committing to become one of our sponsors in this section puts your company in a position to support one of the largest sections of IFT, with over 500 food and nutrition science professionals from industry and academia, including student members who will be provided with several opportunities to learn and grow by participating in our section activities.

All our sponsors are listed on our website, in event invitations, and in promotions. Their respective contributions are also acknowledged during the event(s). Your generous contribution would primarily facilitate student members' participation in the section's events for free and be used as prizes for various student competitions and leadership awards. Surplus funds would be used to provide subsidized price for professional members.

We anticipate such financial support to increase member engagement and eventually make our events more successful.

[Click here to sign up as a corporate sponsor](#)

### Sponsorship Categories

#### Platinum

\$1000 or above

#### Gold

\$750 or above

#### Silver

\$500 or above

#### Bronze

\$250 or above

[Click here to see all the benefits of sponsorship](#)



# Our Sponsors

## PLATINUM SPONSORS



## GOLD SPONSORS



## SILVER SPONSORS



## BRONZE SPONSORS

