



South Eastern Section Institute of Food Technologists Student Competitions 2026

Product development competition: 1st place - \$2000
2nd place - \$1500
3rd place - \$1000

Research competition (3 Minute Thesis): 1st place - \$1000
2nd place - \$500
3rd place - \$250
*for each category

Excellence in leadership and achievement award: \$250
*for each category at each university

Informational session: Oct 20th, 6 PM EST

Deadline to register: December 12th

Student Competitions Chair: Vishal Manjunatha
vishalmanjunatha1993@gmail.com

Student Competitions Co-Chair: Nedra Montgomery
nedra.montgomery@aamu.edu



Product Development Competition

Topic: Innovative Food Product Development **Balancing Indulgent Taste with Wellness and Sustainability through Clean Label and Functional Approaches**

Eligibility guidelines:

- Entrants must be enrolled as students during the 2025-2026 academic year at a 4-year accredited institution, with a declared major in food science or a related field. They must also be student members of the Institute of Food Technologists and the South Eastern Section IFT (eligible schools include Alabama A&M, Auburn, Clemson, Tuskegee, and the University of Georgia).
- Each team must consist of members from the same university, comprising either all undergraduate or graduate students, or a mix of undergraduates and graduates.
- Each university is allowed a maximum of two teams, with only one entry permitted per team.
- A five-page written proposal must be submitted as part of the preliminary round.
- Finalist teams (one per university) will be notified to deliver a 9-minute product presentation (7 minutes for the presentation, followed by 2 minutes for questions) to the jurors on February 4th, 2026, during the SEIFT Suppliers Night Expo at Cobb Galleria in Atlanta, GA.
- Teams must designate a "Team Leader" who will represent the team and receive any awards on their behalf.
- Professors and other external sources may be consulted for reference purposes but should not make significant contributions to the team's work.

Competition details:

The new product must follow the guidelines below:

- Contain **greater than 51% nutrient-dense, clean-label ingredients** (e.g., whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, or other minimally processed foods) by weight of the finished product.
- Feature **functional benefits** such as supporting gut health, enhancing satiety, adaptogens, or other wellness-oriented properties.
- Provide a **good source of nutrients**, containing at least 10% or more of the Daily Value per reference amount.
- Meet **food labeling and regulatory criteria** as specified by the Code of Federal Regulations.
- Incorporate **sustainable solutions** in sourcing, production, or packaging to reduce environmental impact.
- Deliver a balance of **indulgent, crave-worthy taste** with modern consumer expectations for health, wellness, and responsibility.

*Failure to meet the above guidelines will result in disqualification of your submission.

Written proposal specifications:

The five-page preliminary report must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The report must not include any **indication of school affiliation, student, adviser, or ingredient supplier names** (unless the supplier's name is a part of the ingredient's name).
- The report, in PDF format, should not exceed five double-spaced pages, using a font size of at least 11.
- The report should contain the following sections (but is not limited to):
 - Title Page (not counted in the page limit)
 - Product Description – In this section, provide the product details, ensuring that you clearly demonstrate how your product adheres to the guidelines set forth in the “competition details” section.
 - Feasibility of Production/Process Description – Outline the production feasibility and process.
 - Ingredient Functionality – Explain the role of clean-label and nutrient-dense ingredients in delivering product taste, nutrition, wellness benefits, and sustainability.
 - Marketability/Target Market – Demonstrate how the product ties into consumer and marketplace insights.
 - Preliminary Sensory Data – Include any initial sensory data collected.
 - Safety/Shelf-life data of the product – considerations for packaging.
 - Potential challenges during formulation.
 - List of Citations (not counted in the page limit)
 - Process Flow Diagram (not counted in the page limit)
 - Product Photograph (one 5 x 7 image; not counted in the page limit)

The preliminary report will be judged on the following criteria:

Criteria	Points
Innovativeness of concept	10
Link to consumer and marketplace insights	10
Product description (clean-label and nutrient-dense focus)	5
Process description (sustainable sourcing/production)	5
Use of nutrient-dense, clean-label ingredients (>51% by weight is required)	5
Commercial feasibility/Problem solving	5
Marketing/Potential	5
Safety/shelf life	5
Total	50

- Based on the submitted five-page reports, five finalist teams (one from each university) will be selected and notified to give a 9-minute product presentation (7 minutes for the presentation, followed by 2 minutes for questions) to the jurors on February 4th, 2026, during the SEIFT Suppliers Night Expo at Cobb Galleria in Atlanta, GA.
- Finalist teams will be evaluated on a 200-point scale, which will assess the report, presentation, and product.

Finals Judging Criteria

Criteria	Points
The final report will be judged on the following criteria:	
Originality of concept	10
Product description (clean-label and nutrient-dense focus)	5
Process description (sustainable sourcing/production)	5
Use of nutrient-dense, clean-label ingredients (>51% by weight is required)	10
Commercial feasibility/Problem solving	10
Marketing/Potential	5
Safety/shelf life	5
Sub-total	50
The presentation will be judged on the following criteria:	
Enthusiasm of presentation	5
Slide quality/clarity	5
Organization	10
Professionalism of student(s)	10
Feature of clean-label and functional ingredient(s)	5
Overall coverage of material	10
Handling of questions	5
Sub-total	50
The product will be judged on the following criteria:	
Meets expectations (overall liking)	20
Flavor/Aroma (indulgent taste appeal)	20
Texture/Body/Appearance	20
Ease of use/Consumption	20
Packaging (sustainable and consumer-friendly)	10
Prominence of clean-label, nutrient-dense ingredients	10
Sub-total	100
TOTAL	200

1st place - \$2000

2nd place - \$1500

3rd place - \$1000

Registration link: [Google Form Registration Link](#)

Deadline to register: Dec 12th, 2025

Prelims report due: Jan 16th

Preliminary report submission link: [Submission Link](#)

Finalists announced: Jan 19th, 2026



Research Competition – 3 Minute Thesis

Research presentations will follow the format of the 3MT[®] competition, developed by the University of Queensland, which challenges participants to deliver a compelling presentation of their thesis in just three minutes.

Eligibility guidelines:

- Entrants must be enrolled as students during the 2025-2026 academic year at a 4-year accredited institution, with a declared major in food science or a related field. They must also be student members of the Institute of Food Technologists and the Southeastern Section IFT (eligible schools include Alabama A&M, Auburn, Clemson, Tuskegee, and the University of Georgia).

Competition details:

- Two categories: Undergraduate and Graduate.
- The topic can be any type of research or product development for the Undergraduate category, and research, thesis, or dissertation for the Graduate category.
- There is no limit to the number of participants representing each university.
- Preliminary round will require students to submit a recorded version of their three-minute presentation, adhering to the competition rules outlined below.
- Five finalists for each category will be notified to deliver a 3-minute presentation (following the competition rules) to the jurors on February 4th, 2026, during the SEIFT Suppliers Night Expo at Cobb Galleria in Atlanta, GA.

Competition rules:

- A single static PowerPoint slide is permitted. No **posters**, slide transitions, animations or 'movement' of any description are allowed. The slide is to be presented from the beginning of the oration.
- No additional electronic media (e.g. sound and video files) are permitted.
- No additional props (e.g. costumes, musical instruments, laboratory equipment) are permitted.
- Presentations are limited to 3 minutes maximum and competitors exceeding 3 minutes are disqualified.
- Presentations are to be spoken word (e.g. no poems, raps or songs).
- Presentations for the preliminaries should be recorded in presentation mode, while the finals will require live presentations from the stage.
- Preliminary recordings should include both slide and presenter view, using Zoom or a similar platform. [Recording Example 1](#), [Recording Example 2](#)
- Presentations are considered to have commenced when a presenter starts their presentation through either movement or speech.
- The decision of the adjudicating panel is final.

Judging criteria:

- Comprehension and Content
 - Background and significance to the research
 - Clearly described research strategy/design and results/findings of the research
 - Clearly described conclusions, outcomes, impact of research
- Engagement and Communication
 - Clear delivery, language was appropriate for non-specialist audience
 - PowerPoint slide was well defined and enhanced presentation
 - Enthusiasm, maintained audience's attention

Rubric for prelims and finals:

SCORING CALIBRATION:

1 Does not meet expectations	2 Demonstrates competency but some major weaknesses	3 Demonstrates competency but some significant weaknesses	4 Good, but some flaws	5 Very good, only very minor flaws	6 Excellent, almost flawless	7 Outstanding, no flaws
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Please include a score between 1 and 7 in the 2 sections below.
The competitor will then be provided with an overall score out of 14

COMPREHENSION AND CONTENT	
Presentation provided clear background and significance to the research question	
Presentation clearly described the research strategy/design and the results/findings of the research	
Presentation clearly described the conclusions, outcomes and impact of the research	
Score out of 7	

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION	
The oration was delivered clearly, and the language was appropriate for a non-specialist audience	
The PowerPoint slide was well-defined and enhanced the presentation	
The presenter conveyed enthusiasm for their research and captured and maintained the audience's attention	
Score out of 7	

OVERALL SCORE	/14
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1st place - \$1000
 2nd place - \$500
 3rd place - \$250
 *for each category

Registration link: [Google Forms Registration Link](#)

Deadline to register: Dec 12th, 2025

Prelims 3MT recording due: Jan 16th, 2026

Prelims recording submission link: [Submission Link](#)

Finalists announced: Jan 19th, 2026



Excellence in Leadership and Achievement Award

The Southeastern Institute of Food Technologists (SEIFT) Excellence in Leadership and Achievement Award is presented to a **Student Member** who has demonstrated outstanding academic performance, a strong interest in Food Science, and exceptional leadership at the school level as well as within IFT, IFT Student Association (IFTSA), SEIFT, and other relevant organizations. The award includes a certificate and a cash prize of \$250.

Eligibility:

Entrants must be enrolled during the 2025–2026 academic year at a 4-year accredited institution, majoring in food science or a related field, and must hold active student membership in both the IFT and the SEIFT. Eligible institutions include Alabama A&M, Auburn University, Clemson University, Tuskegee University, and the University of Georgia.

Nominations:

The nominator must be an SEIFT member in good standing and affiliated with the nominee's university department. Self-nominations are not allowed. Nomination emails must be sent by the nominator (department chair or faculty member). **Each university is permitted one Undergraduate and one Graduate nominee.**

"Members in good standing" are defined by the SEIFT bylaws as those who have paid membership dues to the SECTION.

Nominees:

Each university may receive up to two awards, one for an undergraduate student and one for a graduate student, provided suitable nominees are available. If a university does not submit a nomination for a particular level, the award for that level may remain unfilled.

Nominations must include the Nomination Form, a Nomination Statement of up to 500 words, describing the nominee's leadership and contributions to their academic program, IFT, SEIFT, and related activities, along with the nominee's resume or CV. Material exceeding the word limit in the Nomination Statement will not be considered in the evaluation process.

Nomination Statement:

Should include the student's:

1. Grade or level
2. Thesis or dissertation title or topic, particularly for graduate students
3. Grade point average
4. A statement highlighting what distinguishes this student academically and how they have showcased their enthusiasm for Food Science.
5. An overview of the student's involvement and leadership within SEIFT, including participation and leadership roles in IFT chapters and other related activities at the regional and national levels.
6. Any other relevant supporting information that highlights the student's achievements and leadership.



The Nomination Form, Nomination Statement, and Resume/CV must be submitted in a **single document** to the SEIFT Student Competitions Chair: Vishal Manjunatha – vishalmanjunatha1993@gmail.com, Co-Chair: Nedra Montgomery – nedra.montgomery@aamu.edu via email by **January 16th, 2026**. Please indicate "SEIFT Student Achievement Scholarship" in the subject line.

Check list: Nomination Form, Nomination Statement, and Resume/CV (single document)

Excellence in Leadership and Achievement Award Nomination Form

Nominee*:

Name: (First, Middle, Last)

Degree designation:

University:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Nominator*:

Name: (First, Middle, Last)

Degree designation:

University:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

*Nominee and nominator MUST be members of Southeastern IFT.