



102nd ANNUAL COLLEGIATE DAIRY PRODUCTS EVALUATION CONTEST April 15th, 2026

2026 Rules
Updated 02/13/2026

The Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest is an annual contest among college students, teams, and individuals, in judging the quality and market grade of sweet cream butter; low, reduced, and full-fat Cheddar cheese; pasteurized, homogenized, 2% fat milk; vanilla ice cream; low, reduced and full fat cottage cheese; low, reduced and full fat strawberry flavored, yogurt (including Greek style) with natural and alternative sweeteners.

This contest is sponsored by the CDPEC Board. A member of USDA is the Superintendent of the contest.

ELIGIBILITY OF CONTESTANTS

Any undergraduate student of a land-grant, State or provincial agricultural college or a college of corresponding rank who: (a) is regularly matriculated in a program leading to a Bachelor of Science degree or its equivalent; (b) has never competed in the national Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest as a contestant or alternate; (c) has never acted as an official judge of dairy products; and (d) has not taught the manufacturing of or the judging of dairy and other food products is eligible to compete in the contest. A minimum of three undergraduate students (up to four) from any one college or university shall constitute a team.

In addition, students from credit-transferable two-year Agricultural Colleges are also eligible, provided they meet the criteria in (b) (c) and (d) in the preceding paragraph.

One or two graduate students of a land-grant, State or provincial agricultural college or a college of corresponding rank who: (a) are regularly matriculated in a program leading to a graduate degree in science or its equivalent; (b) have never competed in the national Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest as a contestant or alternate; and (c) have never acted as an official judge of dairy products. Graduate students from any one college or university will compete individually against graduate students from other colleges or universities. Graduate students will compete in the same contest as the undergraduate students; however, the graduate students will compete for individual awards in the graduate student competition.

Contest officials:

Ms. Allison Reynolds, USDA/AMS, Superintendent
Chad Galer, Dairy Management Inc, Contest Coordinator

Dairy Products Evaluation Coaches Committee (a standing committee of the Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest Board of Directors):
Maneesha Mohan, term ending 2028
Sara Cothran, term ending 2028
Chi Kong (Vincent) Yeung, term ending 2028



RULES GOVERNING CONTEST

1. A complete list of contestant names, for each participating school, must be received by the Contest Superintendent not later than April 8, 2026. The 2026 contest will be held on Wednesday, April 15th, 2026. Regular entry forms will be mailed by the Superintendent at least one month prior to the contest, to the coach of the dairy products judging team and a notification will be sent to the head of the department in which the section of dairy manufacturing is located in each State or provincial agricultural college.
2. Each institution eligible to participate in this contest may enter a team consisting of four eligible undergraduate students of that institution. The best 3 scores in each category will count as the team score and all participants will compete for individual placing. When an institution does not enter a team, it may enter one or two eligible undergraduate students who may compete for individual placing and prizes only.
3. If there is no Regional Contest and the CDEPC Board approves each institution can enter a maximum of 2 alternate students for the contest. The alternate students can be a graduate or undergraduate student. These alternate students are not eligible to win the contest and can take part in the contest as contestant in the following year.
4. Each institution eligible to participate in this contest may enter one or two eligible graduate student(s) of that institution. The graduate student(s) will participate as (an) individual(s) competing against graduate students from other institutions.
5. Each contestant shall report to the Superintendent of the contest at such time and place as may be announced. He/she will then be assigned a contestant number, or group number, and be given such instruction as the Superintendent may deem necessary.
6. The contestants shall be divided into six approximately equal groups. No more than six students per team will be allowed to participate (i.e., a maximum of four undergraduates, and two graduates). No two competing students officially representing a school may be in the same group.
7. No contestant shall wear any uniform, college colors, college badges, college pin, or any other distinctive dress that may in any way reveal his/her identity or the identity of the college which he/she represents. Nor shall any contestant wear any strong perfume, cologne, shaving lotion, etc., which might interfere with the sensory evaluation of the products.
8. No food or drink of any kind may be brought into the contest by participants. Exceptions will be allowed at the discretion of the Contest Superintendent and/or the Contest Coordinator, as long as the request is made on or before the Coaches Committee meeting, the evening prior to the Contest. No cell phones, bags, backpacks, purses, etc., are allowed into the contest, but contestants may wear a single fanny pack. The contents of the fanny pack are limited to medical necessities, hygiene products, trier(s), sheath, spatula(s), #2 pencils, clipboard, and drinking cup(s).
9. While the contest is in progress or during the 5-minute rest period there shall be no communication between the contestants or between contestants and any other person, except as directed by the Superintendent or his/her representatives. There shall be no intermingling of groups or communication between groups while the judging is in progress or during the rest periods. Students' use of personal electronic devices is prohibited.
10. Reporters, photographers, and others except the contestants, the Superintendent, and his/her assistants, shall be excluded from the place of scoring while the contest is in progress. Exceptions to this rule shall be made by the Superintendent to promote the good of the contest. No smoking shall be permitted in the contest room.



11. Any contest official noticing an infraction during the contest will warn the contestant by describing the infraction verbally and by a copy of a written notice that includes the individual's name, school and contest id. The contestant will be allowed to continue to judge. Scoring officials will eliminate the scoring of any contestant with two or more signed infractions. If a member of any team is debarred because of violation of rules, that team will be debarred from the team contest. The remaining members of the team may compete for individual prizes.
12. Each contestant, at the beginning of the contest will be given an electronic scoring device that they will enter their "contest number" into. At the expiration of the contest, he/she shall return it to the Superintendent, official product judge, or assistant in charge.
13. Each contestant shall criticize, score, and follow the marking instructions on the electronic scoring device in the proper places, 8 samples each of butter; low, reduced and full fat Cheddar cheese; pasteurized, homogenized, 2% fat milk; vanilla ice cream; low, reduced and full fat cottage cheese; low, reduced and full fat strawberry flavored, Swiss style yogurt with natural and alternative sweeteners.
14. Thirty-five minutes are allotted for scoring each product. A 10-minute notice prior to the close of a scoring period shall be given. A 2-minute period shall be allowed to check their scoring. A 5- minute rest period shall be allowed between the judging of each product.
15. The products shall be criticized and scored on the basis described on pages 9-10.

SUPERINTENDENT OF CONTEST

The Superintendent of the contest shall carry the major responsibility of the contest. He/she shall take care of all preliminary work incident to the contest such as (a) notifying and instructing the official judges; (b) distributing copies of the rules of the contest to the various schools; (c) checking on the adequacy and suitability (freedom from odors and temperatures about 69° to 70°F) of space provided for the contest; and (d) assisting the official judges, the day immediately preceding the contest in any way will expedite the work.

He/she shall determine that all rules and regulations governing the contest are duly carried out and see that the contest is conducted with fairness to all.

He/she shall counsel with members of the CDPEC Coaches Committee, on all questions which may arise in connection with the interpretation of the rules governing the contest and make temporary rulings to facilitate the working of the rules in force at the beginning of the contest.

He/she shall have a sufficient number of assistants and clerks to help in conducting the contest. These assistants and clerks shall be present to (a) assist the Superintendent in determining that the products are scored according to the rules; (b) aid in starting the contest; and/or (c) compute the contestant grades if such assistance is desired.

He/she shall direct the contestants as to the products to evaluate, time to commence work, and time to stop. He/she or an official timekeeper designated by the Superintendent shall notify the contestants 10 minutes prior to the close of the evaluation period.

After instructing the contestants in a body regarding the contest, the form in which to prepare the scores and criticisms, etc., he/she shall say nothing to any contestants as to the method for a contestant to follow in scoring.



The chairman and/or members of the CPDEC Coaches Committee shall be available to address any problems arising during the contest.

The superintendent shall have charge of all records and shall have all ratings totaled and tabulated. He/she shall deliver the results of the contest for printing.

Assistant and Clerks. An assistant, who shall be selected by the Superintendent of the contest, shall have charge of each group of contestants. Each contestant in his/her group shall remain in the presence of the assistant throughout the entire time the contest is in progress. In case of an emergency, the absence shall be directed by the Superintendent. They shall see that there is no intermingling of groups during the rest period.

SELECTION, PREPARATION, AND MARKING OF PRODUCTS

The products may be donated by any commercial dairy enterprise other than a college or university entity.

The official judge of each product named by the Superintendent of the contest shall select samples of sweet cream butter; low, reduced, and full-fat Cheddar cheese; pasteurized, homogenized 2% milk; vanilla ice cream; low, reduced, and full-fat cottage cheese; low, reduced and full-fat strawberry flavored, yogurt (including Greek style) with natural and alternative sweeteners, respectively, which in his/her judgment will make a representative scoring contest for each product. Whenever possible, the products shall be obtained from different regions of the United States. A sufficient number of samples (not fewer than 13) shall be available so that in case of disagreement among the judges, other samples may be substituted. Identical samples may be used in the contest. Only "Cheddar", rindless block", "daisy", "twin", or "flat" styles of Cheddar cheese may be used in the contest. Nothing artificial shall be added to any sample that will affect its flavor or in any other way change its score, except especially prepared 2% fat milk, cottage cheese, or ice cream samples may be used, if necessary, to secure more representative classes of samples. All samples shall be of such quality as to be salable, commercial products.

The cottage cheese samples will be small curd type. The samples shall be numbered consecutively from left to right and the numbers shall be marked plainly on the packages.

Any markings on the containers that might indicate brand, quality or other information shall be concealed.

The butter and Cheddar cheese shall be properly tempered to 45° to 55°F, immediately preceding the contest. The official ice cream lead judge shall see that the ice cream is tempered properly for dipping.

A representative plug shall be drawn from each Cheddar cheese sample in the contest and placed in a clean test tube, sealed, and securely placed beside each corresponding cheese sample. This plug shall be used for grading "appearance" by the official judges and contestants and shall not be handled by anyone during the contest.

Each bottle of 2% milkfat milk used for flavor examination shall be identified by means of a tag securely fastened to it by a string or wire or by numbers written with odorless markers on the sample container. Each lot of milk, regardless of source, shall be thoroughly mixed in a suitable container to ensure uniformity prior to immediate bottling in like containers. All bottles shall be capped with identifiable caps.

The milk samples shall be set out at a temperature of 50°F at the time of scoring. The official judges shall score each sample of milk for flavor before the contest.

The official judge of cottage cheese shall place in an appropriately sized dish one scoop of cottage cheese for each sample for grading of color and appearance. These dishes shall not be handled by



anyone during the contest. These samples must be judged in the first 10 minutes after which they will be removed from the contest area. A warning will be given after 8 minutes.

The official judge of strawberry flavored, yogurts shall provide 3 replicates of each sample in their original 6 or 8 oz. commercial containers. Replicates #2 and #3 shall be covered with foil or a blank carton.

Replicate #1 shall be inverted, with minimal disturbance of product structure, on an appropriately sized plate. The students may not disturb the sample on the plate.

Replicate #2 shall have a spoon for removal of samples by the contestants. Samples should be removed without disturbing the remainder of the cup.

Replicate #3, in its original 6 or 8 oz container, shall be left undisturbed and shall be used to judge only 'free whey' and 'shrunken'. This sample must be judges in the first 10 minutes after which they will be removed from the contest area. A warning will be given after 8 minutes.

JUDGES

An evaluation committee for each product shall consist of (a) An official lead judge and no less than two official associate judges who shall be selected by the Superintendent of the contest from one or more commercial dairy enterprises, (official judges shall not participate as an official judge in the same product in regional contest) and (b) coach judges assigned to each product by the Chairperson of the CPDEC Coaches Committee, from the coaches with teams entered in the contest. The coach judge shall re-evaluate the contest product samples before the contest starts on the day of the contest.

It shall be the duty of the official judges to score each product in their portion of the contest and enter on a scorecard their scores and attributes which correctly characterize each product. These scores and attributes upon review by assigned coach judges become official for the contest and are used as the basis of electronic scoring of contestants' submissions. All official scorecards for each product shall be verified and signed by all official, associate, and coach judges.

The associate judges shall work with the lead official judges and satisfy themselves that any attribute(s) noted by the lead official judges is (are) present to the degree indicated and that no attributes have been overlooked.

The coach judges, scoring independently of the official and associate judges, shall examine the products assigned to them and satisfy themselves that the attribute(s) noted by the official judge is (are) present and scored correctly.

If there is disagreement, the All Products judge or Contest Superintendent shall be called to serve as a referee. If the disagreement cannot be rectified, the lead official judge shall replace the sample(s) in question with another sample(s) on which there is agreement.

The Superintendent may appoint an official All Products Judge from a commercial dairy enterprise or other neutral entity. The duties of the official All Products Judge shall be to examine all products set out for the contest noting whether: (a) The products selected fairly represent the different sections of the country; (b) the samples constitute a good class for student judging; and (c) the products are well judged.

All coach judges of dairy products shall remain in the contest room or in the vicinity of the product that they have judged until the contestants are under the direct supervision of the Superintendent of the contest.



The grading committee shall check the final official scores noting particularly that attributes considered in grading contestant attributes are checked thereon and that the official judging has been done according to the rules.

The products shall be evaluated on the basis described on pages 10 to 15 and shall be checked after actually being placed on the table for the judging contest. In general, the products will be evaluated according to suggested scoring guides approved by the CPDE coaches Committee. After the contest is over, the coaches may score the various products, and judges shall then give their scores and explain their evaluation to the coaches and contestants.

GRADING OF CONTESTANT'S SCORES

The contestant's scores shall be graded by electronic means. The tabulation shall be accomplished by using a programmed electronic system. Results shall not be revealed to any coach or contestant before the awards presentation.

Computer tabulation officials have the incumbent responsibility to ascertain accurate functioning of the computerized scoring system.

The grading shall be done as follows:

Score

A contestant's score of each sample represented on the scorecard will be given a grade expressed by the difference between his/her score, except as indicated below, and the official score. For example, if a contestant scores "flavor" 7 and the judges' score is 5, the contestant shall receive a grade of 2 points

If, however, a contestant recognizes that the sample scores are perfect, but fails to indicate that score on his/her scorecard, he/she shall receive a grade equivalent to the maximum cut for that sample. For example, the normal range of score on the body and texture of cottage cheese, 1-5, represents a maximum cut of 5 points. The contestant's grade, therefore, shall be 5 when he/she fails to indicate the numerical score for that item. This rule holds regardless of the official score.

Product Attributes

The grading of attributes is independent of the grading of product scores and is based on the contestant's proficiency in recognizing the same quality merits and defects of the various samples as noted by the official judges. Each attributes indicated by the contestant shall be involved in the grading. The contestant's grade on attributes for a single item shall be:

(1) Perfect, 0, when the contestant:

- (a) Marks only those attributes recognized by the officials, judges, or
- (b) Recognizes, like the official judges, that the item is above criticism, under which conditions a mark is not necessary.

(2) The maximum, 2.0 points when the contestant:

- (a) Fails to check any of the defect(s) noted by the official judge;
- (b) Marks a defect(s) when the sample was judged by the official judges as being above criticism;
- (c) Fails to check a criticism(s) when the official judge scores the sample within the criticizable range (although the contestant may have scored the sample above criticism); or
- (d) Fails to mark an attribute(s) when his/her score indicates he/she should have (although the official judges scored the sample above criticism).



(3) **Less than 2, 0.50, 0.67, 1.00, 1.33, 1.50, or 1.60, etc. of a point according to the percentage of the attributes checked correctly.**

Examples:

- (a) The official judges marked 3 attributes and the contestant marks only 1 which is identical with one of the official attributes. The grade shall be 1.33.
- (b) The official judges marked 1 attribute and the contestant marks 3, one of which coincides with that of the official judge. The grade shall be 1.33.
- (c) The official judges marked 3 attributes and the contestant marks 3, one of which is identical with one of the official attributes. The grade shall be 1.60. (A total of 5 different criticisms has been involved by the official judges and contestant. The contestant and official agree on one of them. Thus, the contestant is 1/5 correct or 4/5 incorrect, earning a grade of 1.60).

Grades

A contestant's grade on a sample shall be the sum of his/her grades on "score" and "attributes" of that sample. His/her grade on a product shall be the sum of his/her grades on the 8 samples of that product.

A team grade for each product shall be the sum of the grades of its members.

As "grade" in this contest means "points lost", the contestant with the lowest "grade" shall be the winner of the product evaluation, and the team with the lowest "grade" shall be the winning team for the product evaluation.

Certification of Grading

The general supervisor of the electronic scoring system shall certify to the committee on evaluation that each contestant's submission was graded accurately and according to the rules prescribed herewith. These certified grades shall be the official and final grades used by the CPDEC Coaches Committee, in determining the contestant and team standings in the contest.

Standings

Contestant Standings in each product shall be obtained by arranging the grades of all contestants in that product in order from the lowest to the highest. Team standings in each product shall be obtained the same way.

Contestant standings in All Products shall be determined by arranging the sum of the ranks of the individual in each of the six products (butter; low, reduced and full fat Cheddar cheese; pasteurized, homogenized, 2% fat milk; vanilla ice cream; low, reduced and full fat cottage cheese; low, reduced and full fat strawberry flavored, Swiss style yogurt with natural and alternative sweeteners) in order from the lowest to the highest. Team standings in all products shall be determined by arranging the sum of the ranks of the team in each of the six products in order from the lowest to the highest.

Breaking Ties

When two or more contestants or teams (except teams in "All Products") tie, the tie shall be broken in favor of the contestant or team having the lowest grade on flavor score; if there is still a tie, it shall be broken in favor of the one having the lowest grade on flavor attributes and then, if necessary, on other items in the order in which they appear on the various score cards. Team ties in "All products", involving



a prize, shall be broken in favor of the team having the least sum of the individual grades (points lost) in the judging of the separate products. If no prize is involved, the placing may remain a tie.

PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL DAIRY PRODUCTS EVALUATION EVENTS

Participation of United States Dairy Products Evaluation Teams in similar contests organized in other countries may be arranged, as resources and invitations exist, with assistance from the officials of this contest. The following guidelines will apply to this participation.

1. The Superintendent and the CDPEC Coaches Committee shall determine suitability of any international contest for participation by a U.S. team with input from other contest officials who may have knowledge of the event under consideration. The officials will consider the contest location, rules, scoring methods, products evaluated, and the general likeness of the international competition to the U.S. Collegiate Contest. The availability of financial assistance to help defray travel costs will also be considered.
2. A U.S. Dairy Products Evaluation Team will be established to represent the United States in the international competition. This team shall be composed of the undergraduates who place first through fifth in All Products at the current year's contest. Eligibility shall require United States Citizenship. If an eligible student should elect not to participate in the USA Team, the vacancy shall be filled by the eligible individual placing consecutively in All Products.
3. The USDA Team shall be accompanied and trained by the coach of the winning school in the current year's contest. Should that coach be unavailable, the coach of the team placing second (and consecutively) in the U.S. contest shall be appointed as the USA Team coach. Additionally, the USDA Team may be accompanied by the Superintendent or a designated representative, and other interested contest officials and team coaches, as may be appropriate or necessary.



102nd ANNUAL COLLEGIATE DAIRY PRODUCTS EVALUATION CONTEST

April 15th, 2026

Product Attributes and Scores

Milk				Ice Cream				Butter			
Flavor	S	D	P	Flavor	S	D	P	Flavor	S	D	P
Acid	3	1	*	Acid	4	2	*	Acid	6	5	4
Bitter	5	3	1	Cooked	9	7	5	Bitter	6	5	4
Cooked	9	8	6	High Flavor	9	8	7	Cheesy	3	2	1
Feed	9	8	5	High Sweetness	9	8	7	Coarse	9	7	6
Fermented/ Fruity	5	3	1	Lacks Fine Flavor	9	8	7	Feed	9	8	6
Flat	9	8	7	Lacks Freshness	8	7	6	Flat	9	8	7
Foreign	5	3	1	Low Flavoring	8	6	4	Garlic/Onion	3	2	1
Garlic/onion	5	3	1	Low Sweetness	9	8	6	High Salt	7	6	5
Lacks Freshness	8	7	6	Old Ingredient	6	4	2	Metallic	4	3	1
Malty	5	3	1	Oxidized	6	4	1	Musty	5	4	2
Oxidized - Light	6	4	1	Rancid	4	2	*	Neutralizer	5	4	3
Oxidized - Metal	5	3	1	Salty	8	7	5	Old Cream	6	5	4
Rancid	4	1	*	Syrup Flavor	9	7	5	Oxidized	4	3	2
Salty	8	6	4	Unnatural Flavor	8	6	4	Rancid	4	2	1
Unclean	3	1	*	Whey	7	6	4	Scorched	7	5	3
								Storage	6	5	4
				Body/Texture				Unclean/Utensil	5	4	3
				Crumbly	4	3	2	Whey	6	5	3
				Fluffy	3	2	1	Yeasty	4	3	2
				Greasy	4	3	2				
				Gummy	4	2	1				
				Icy	4	2	1				
				Sandy	2	1	*				
				Soggy	4	3	2				
				Weak	4	2	1				

S = Slight

D = Definite

P = Pronounced

***** = Unsalable (note: * is not an option on contestant score cards)

Note: A slight cooked flavor that is not objectionable may be scored a perfect 10 with no criticism (Butter Only)



Cheddar Cheese				Swiss Style Yogurt				Creamed Cottage Cheese			
Flavor	S	D	P	Flavor	S	D	P	Flavor	S	D	P
Bitter	9	7	4	Bitter	9	7	5	Bitter	7	5	1
Feed	9	8	6	Cooked	9	8	6	Cooked	9	8	6
Fermented	7	5	3	Foreign	8	7	6	Fermented/Fruity	5	3	1
Flat/Low Flavor	9	8	7	High Acetaldehyde	9	7	5	Flat	9	8	7
Fruity	7	5	3	High Acid	9	7	5	Foreign	7	4	1
Heated	9	8	7	High Flavoring	9	8	7	High Acid	9	7	5
High Acid	9	7	5	High Intensity Sweeteners	9	7	5	High Diacetyl	9	7	6
Metallic	7	5	2	High Sweetness	9	8	7	High Salt	9	8	7
Oxidized	8	6	3	Lacks Fine Flavor	9	8	7	Lacks Fine Flavor	9	8	7
Rancid	6	4	1	Lacks Freshness	8	7	6	Lacks Freshness	8	7	6
Sulfide	9	7	4	Low Acid	9	8	6	Metallic	5	3	1
Unclean	8	6	3	Low Flavoring	9	8	7	Oxidized	5	3	1
Whey Taint	8	7	5	Low Sweetness	9	8	7	Rancid	4	2	1
Yeasty	6	4	1	Old Ingredient	7	5	3	Sweet	8	7	6
				Oxidized	6	4	1	Unclean	6	3	1
Body/Texture				Rancid	4	2	*	Whey	8	7	5
Corky	4	3	2	Unclean	6	4	1				
Crumbly	4	3	2	Unnatural Flavor	8	6	4	Body/Texture			
Crystals	4	3	1	Yeasty	6	4	2	Firm/Rubbery	4	2	1
Curdy	4	3	2					Mealy/Grainy	4	2	1
Gassy	3	2	1	Body/Texture				Overstabilized	4	3	2
Mealy	4	3	2	Gel-like	4	3	2	Pasty	3	2	1
Open	4	3	2	Grainy	4	3	2	Weak/soft	4	3	2
Pasty	4	3	1	Ropy	3	2	1				
Short	4	3	2	Too Firm	4	3	2	Appearance			
Weak	4	3	2	Weak	4	3	2	Free Cream	4	2	1
				High Astringency	4	3	2	Free Whey	4	2	1
								Lacks Cream	4	3	2
				Appearance				Matted	4	2	1
				Color Leaching	4	3	2	Shattered Curd	4	3	2
				Excess Fruit	4	3	2	Non-Uniform	4	3	2
				Free Whey	4	3	2				
				Lacks Fruit	4	3	2				
				Lumpy	4	3	2				
				Shrunken	4	3	2				

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