



**11th ANNUAL ALABAMA
SEAFOOD COOK-OFF**

Sponsored by The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Submit your recipe for consideration to be among our TOP FOUR finalists selected to compete in the 11th annual Sweet Grown Alabama Seafood Cook-Off (ASCO). Your recipe will be evaluated by judges consisting of previous competitors in both ASCO and the Great American Seafood Cook-Off (GASCO), industry experts, and/or *members of Sweet Grown Alabama*. *If your submission is selected into the top four, you will compete in the one-day ASCO event on Monday, May 18 at The Wharf in Orange Beach, Alabama.* To be considered for this competition, the lead/executive chef for your two-person team must email the registration information below along with the detailed and complete recipe he/she plans to prepare for the competition.

Forms and recipes must be submitted to ellie@sweetgrownalabama.org by March 16, 2026. Finalists will be announced no later than April 1, 2026. See below for more information.

Submission Requirements:

The lead chef must email the following to ellie@sweetgrownalabama.org by March 16, 2026:

- The name of chef, name of assistant chef, restaurant/organization being represented, email and phone number*
- The complete and detailed recipe being submitted. Please include dish title, recipe ingredients and preparation instructions. The recipe submitted MUST be the recipe that the contestant will prepare if selected as one of the top four finalists to compete in the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off. The recipe must include Alabama Gulf Seafood as the main ingredient **plus a locally grown component**. Please refer to the Rules and Regulations section below for more details.

*Top four competitors selected will then need to submit additional information including high-res photograph of chef, bio and

restaurant logo. DISCLOSURE: All forms, photos and recipes become property of Sweet Grown Alabama and the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off competition for the sole purpose of promoting fresh Alabama Gulf Seafood. Photos and recipes will be used in online promotions, print media, press releases, etc. Credit will be given to the chefs and their restaurants.

Submission Deadline: March 16, 2026

COMPETITION SELECTION:

The selection of the top four finalists is anonymous. Judge(s) are unaware of the chef and/or restaurant associated with any recipe being reviewed throughout the entire selection process. When chefs formally submit for competition consideration, event coordinators will remove any identifiable qualifiers (name, restaurant affiliation, etc.) prior to these entries moving to the judges for the selection phase. Only submitted recipes will be presented to the panel.

The top four recipes will be selected based on the judging criteria to be used to score the dish at the competition (Creativity, Harmony, Flavor, etc.).

In making their blind recipe decisions, judges are looking for dishes that incorporate fresh, Alabama Gulf Seafood that can be commercially available within the state and a locally grown product from an Alabama farmer. Dishes do not necessarily have to be traditional, Alabama fare; however, placing an emphasis on locally sourced ingredients is favorable. Creativity is welcomed, if Alabama Gulf Seafood is the featured, main ingredient.

COMPETITION SCORING:

As judges critique an entry/display, points are awarded in five categories and then averaged to yield a single score for the entry/display. Entries are scored with 100 total points possible.

20 points – Presentation, General Impression and Serving Methods
20 points – Creativity and Practicality
20 points – Composition and Harmony of Ingredients
20 points – Correct Preparation and Craftsmanship
20 points – Flavor, Taste and Texture

*Alabama Seafood Cook-Off utilizes the format of the Great American Seafood Cook-Off by ensuring judging and scoring are consistent during the competition.

HOW IT'S JUDGED:

Each chef team will present one plated dish to each of the competition judges and provide a short description of the dish. Additional plated dishes prepared will be displayed for viewing and photography.

Presentation, General Impression and Serving Methods: Fresh, easy to eat, correct temperature, hot/cold serving plate, stylistic but practical. Dish was completed/served within the one-hour time limit.

Creativity: The dish shows a degree of difficulty and creative flair, rather than something copied and overused. If using an old or classical idea, new, creative ideas have been used to transform the dish. Degree of difficulty, artistic achievement, work involved, and originality are evaluated.

Composition and Harmony of Ingredients: Ingredients are compatible. The seafood should showcase compatibility with the local component. Ingredient colors are visually pleasing. Ingredient amounts are correctly portioned to give a perfect harmonization. Taste and colors should enhance each other and display practical craftsmanship.

Preparation and Craftsmanship: Classical names should correspond to original recipes and methods of preparation. Preparations must display mastery of basic skills.

Flavor, Taste, and Texture: The stated flavors in the menu and recipe are key. Serving temperatures are correct. The textures correspond to what was implied in the recipe. The flavor of the sauce reflects the recipe's description and has a pleasing consistency. The dish portrays a high level of skill and exactness.

COMPETITION RULES & REGULATIONS:

Below are the listed regulations for the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off competition. The stated regulations are non-negotiable and reflect the decisions of Sweet Grown Alabama.

The following regulations have been put in place for the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off:

- Previous ASCO lead/executive chef winners of the Alabama Gulf Seafood Cookoff (1st place only) are not allowed to compete again.
- Sous chefs that have been on a winning team of the Alabama Gulf Seafood Cookoff (1st place) are eligible for participation but are required to wait one year before entering the competition again.
 - Example: The sous chef on the winning (1st place) team in 2024 cannot participate in the competition again until 2026.
- A restaurant is allowed to have one representing chef team submit. If multiple chefs from one restaurant submit recipe entries, Sweet Grown Alabama will only consider the first recipe submitted from that entity.
- Both lead/executive chefs and sous chefs are allowed to submit one recipe for one team. Multiple entries containing the same chefs but on different teams are not allowed and will not be eligible for participation.
- Both lead/executive chef and sous chef must be affiliated with a restaurant and/or organization within the state of Alabama.
- Chefs will be selected with four regions of the state in mind. Before identifying qualifiers are removed from each chef entry, chefs will be categorized into their respective region based on location of their affiliated restaurant or organization. The four categorizing regions are:
 - The Gulf / Panhandle Region (Mobile, Fairhope, Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, etc.)
 - The Southern Region (Above the Panhandle and below Tuscaloosa)
 - The Northern Region (Tuscaloosa and Above)
 - The Wildcard (Can be located anywhere across the state, added for fairness and accountability)

RULES:

- Alabama Gulf seafood must be the featured ingredient. Multiple seafood proteins are permitted.
- Seafood used as the main dish ingredient must be commercially available within the state of Alabama.
- A second locally grown component from an Alabama farmer must be visible. You can find common products grown in the state of Alabama at SweetGrownAlabama.org. Chefs are encouraged to promote the farm from which this item was sourced on signage and as they discuss with the emcee.
- Chefs will be responsible for all food products used in the event.
- Chefs will be responsible for all small wares used in the competition. Pans, blenders, cutting boards, etc. will not be provided. The Alabama Seafood Cook-off will only provide two (2) portable burners, one (1) shared oven and one (1) shared fryer.
- Chefs may bring ONE (1) assistant chef.

- Each chef will have 1-hour total to cook, prepare and submit individually plated servings of the pre-submitted seafood recipe. Dishes will be judged as-is at the end of the one-hour, regardless of completion. Portions must be prepared and presented within the stated timeframe. There must be enough plated portions for each judge (4) and additional plates prepared for photos (2).
- Chefs are required to bring their own plates, dishes, etc. to be served to the judges.
- Chef teams will be required to wear a Sweet Grown Alabama branded apron provided by the Sweet Grown Alabama team during the entirety of the ASCO competition.
- Chef teams will be required to participate in all ASCO weekend events leading up to the ASCO competition. Details are still being finalized, but we anticipate this to include a welcome dinner the night before the ASCO competition and a tour the day of.
- All dish components must be prepared in the 1-hour provided.
- Homemade and homegrown sauces, seasonings, vegetables, fruits, etc. are encouraged to be noted in the recipe submission.
- Drink pairings are welcomed but are not required and will not be rated for points toward the chef's overall score. Only the dish will be rated for points in the competition.
- Simple stocks may be prepared in advance. All other dish components must be prepared within the allocated 1-hour. Prior to the competition, participating chefs are allowed to:
 - Butcher, clean and trim seafood to be used. Shrimp may also be deveined.
 - Vegetables and lettuce can be cleaned and washed but not cut or shaped in any form; beans may be pre-soaked. Exceptions are chopped herbs.
 - No finished sauces can be prepared in advance; however, flavored oils, original seasonings/spices, and basic stocks (beef, veal, chicken, vegetable or fish) may be pre-portioned and brought in as necessary for the recipe.

**All competitors should demonstrate appropriate cooking techniques, basic culinary preparation skills and sanitation skills.*

WEEKEND DETAILS:

Participants of the 2026 Alabama Seafood Cook-Off will receive and participate in:

- Two-night stay at SpringHill Suites at The Wharf, courtesy of Sweet Grown Alabama (Sunday, May 17 – Tuesday, May 19)
- A tentative welcome reception on Sunday, May 17
- Publicity on SweetGrownAlabama.org, Sweet Grown Alabama's newsletter sent to over 15,000 consumers, Sweet Grown Alabama's social media pages and in earned news media coverage

Above offerings are subject to change at any time with no notice.

AWARDS:

The winner of the 2026 Alabama Seafood Cook-Off will receive:

- A \$2,500 cash prize
- A first-place trophy
- A Sweet Grown Alabama branded apron to wear during both the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off and the Great American Seafood Cook-Off
- Automatic participation and state representation in the Great American Seafood Cook-Off (GASCO) held in New Orleans each summer*

**This specific reward also requires the winner to be a spokesperson for Alabama Seafood on a national stage. All travel expenses to the GASCO competition are the winning chef's responsibility. Sweet Grown Alabama is not responsible for*

travel or lodging expenses. The chef can put his or her ASCO cash prize toward any GASCO expenses. Above offerings are subject to change at any time with no notice.

ABOUT GASCO:

The Great American Seafood Cook-Off is a nationally televised cooking competition that places the nation's greatest chefs from across the country in an event using the same format as the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off. At the end of the competition, the winner will be crowned America's King/Queen of seafood. For more information, visit greatamericanseafoodcookoff.com.

REGISTRATION:

Submit your recipe by March 16, 2026 for your chance to be selected as a top four finalist to compete in the 11th Annual Alabama Seafood Cook-Off on Monday, May 18 at The Wharf in Orange Beach, AL.

Submit form to ellie@sweetgrownalabama.org

For questions or concerns, please contact Ellie Watson, Sweet Grown Alabama Director at ellie@sweetgrownalabama.org or 334-399-7748.