



2026 MALLET Food Competition Rules

Presented By: The Restaurant Store

Online Entry Form

<https://form.jotform.com/251405622291147>

Overview

This competition is for Maryland State Fair Food Vendors. Maryland State Fair challenges its food vendors to submit the most innovative, interesting and mouthwatering food creations they can dream up to compete in The Mallet. Two phases of judging will narrow down entries to ten finalists and culminate in the crowning of Best Sweet, Best Savory, and Most Creative. All Vendors who enter and are selected as finalists, will be highlighted in Fair promotional material in relation to The Mallet.

Eligibility

All food vendors at the Maryland State Fair may participate. Each Vendor may enter up to one (1) sweet and one (1) savory entry per business. (e.g., if you have two stands with the same business name and same products, you may submit a total of one sweet and one savory entry. If you have two stands with different names and different products, you may submit a total of two sweet and two savory entries.)

In the case of duplicate entries being submitted, they will be chosen to participate by the order in which they were received, even if all entries were received before the submission deadline. Vendors are able to win multiple years in a row.

The following items must be submitted by June 15, 2026:

1. Completed MALLET entry form
2. Color photo(s) of new food item – *Internal judging is based off of these photos*
 - a. Photos may not contain any logos, Vendor names or promotional materials.
 - b. Photos must portray food as it will be served at the Fair. One photo **MUST** be horizontal.
 - a. Perceived taste, lighting, clarity and backdrop can play a big role in how the food is seen and judged.
 - b. These photos are also used for any promotional distribution, so it is highly recommended that you pay attention to the quality of the photo you are submitting. (See attached Food Photography Tips)

Items submitted must be new to the 2026 Maryland State Fair. You may enter items that have not been on your approved menu for three years or more.

Finalists must carry the submitted item on their menu and be able to produce the submitted item for the full duration of the 2026 Maryland State Fair. Finalists who do not carry their submitted item will be prohibited from entering the MALLET competition the following year.

Please note: If a Vendor selected as a finalist is unable to keep product available in the days before the final judging, MDSF reserves the right to revoke the finalist status of any participant based on the severity of the Vendor's inability to meet customer demand. Final decisions will be made at the discretion of Maryland State Fair Management.

Entry Deadline

Competition submissions with photos must be received by midnight on June 15, 2026. Entries must be submitted online via the online form. All competition entries will be reviewed by the Maryland State Fair Staff. Vendors will be notified of their inclusion as a MALLET finalist by Monday, June 22, 2026.

Judging

All entries will be judged on the following criteria in both phases of judging:

Appearance & Presentation	20%
Creativity & Originality	40%
Taste (presumed for Initial, actual for Final)	40%
TOTAL	100%

Initial Judging

An internal panel consisting of five anonymous Maryland State Fair employees will conduct an evaluation of the competition entries based on a review of the menu item description and photos provided by each vendor. Points will be assigned based on appearance & presentation, creativity & originality, and presumed taste (vendors may not supply samples for preliminary review). Using these criteria, and the provided photograph(s), the panel will narrow the field to ten finalists.

Vendors will be notified of the results of the preliminary judging no later than Monday, June 15, 2026. All finalists will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement stating that they will not release any information regarding their participation to the media or public before Maryland State Fair's scheduled press release.

Final Judging

Final judging will take place at the Fair on Sunday, August 30 at 10:00am. Final judging will be conducted by a panel of five external judges in front of a live audience on the State Fair Free Stage. Judges will consist of food professionals, social media food influencers, tv personalities, etc.

All finalists must be able to provide seven (7) full-size sample items for the judges on the date of final judging. Finalists will deliver the food at pre-set, staggered times for optimal freshness while judging.

Items must be identically produced as they would be for public consumption. All ingredients must be exactly the same as the initial submission, no substitutions allowed. Items must be served with the same plating, utensils and garnish as it will be served during the Fair. Vendors

who alter ingredients between the initial judging and final judging or do not present entries as Fairgoers will receive them will automatically be penalized 10 points from their total score. The Most Creative winner will be selected from among the 10 finalists and could be either a sweet or savory item.

Finalists must have two authorized representatives available at the final judging. One vendor representative must be able to speak on behalf of your business, the other will assist with plating and serving/clearing judges' plates.

Awards

Judges will select the winners and award Best Sweet, Best Savory, and Most Creative.

A vendor that wins Best Sweet or Best Savory is eligible to also win Most Creative. The winners will each receive a large Mallet sign, designating them as a winner, a custom Maryland State Fair Swag Item, and a \$300 gift card to the Restaurant Store. **The Most Creative winner prize TBD.**

All 10 finalists will receive a sign, designating them as a finalist, and must display the sign throughout the entirety of the Fair.

Publicity

The Marketing & PR Teams will make the MALLET winners a highlighted priority in all applicable Fair related media, interviews, and marketing efforts leading up to, and during the 2026 Maryland State Fair. This may include, but is not limited to, additional interviews with media, extra social media posts and email blasts, special advertisements, etc.

Schedule of Events

Submission Deadline: June 15, 2026

Finalists Notified: June 22, 2026

Finalists Announced Publicly: August 1, 2026

Final Judging: Sunday, August 30, 2026 at 10am

Questions

Any questions about The MALLET should be directed to Jeremy D'Angelo at 410-252-0200 ext 233 or jdangelo@marylandstatefair.com.