

Investing in local culinary competition puts pulses in the hands of future chefs

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What do you remember most about your favourite restaurant? The décor? The location? The occasion? Or, more likely, a delicious dish from the menu. While social media highlights food trends, if you want to try the trend at home, you need to get the ingredients, make the dish and then hope it's as good as the online photos. If you're like me, I like to experience food trends at a local restaurant prepared by a local chef and savour the experience. Odds are you are more likely to go home and make that delicious dish with that new ingredient (or two) once you've tried it. That's one of the reasons why working with future and seasoned chefs at a variety of events is vital to getting pulses on the plate in the restaurant and at home.

High School Culinary Challenge – future chefs compete

The High School Culinary Challenge (HSCC) is a key event for the Canadian Culinary Fund. HSCC introduces students to a team cooking competition, to experience cooking in a professional, state-of-the-art kitchen and to compete for scholarships for the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) cook apprentice program and other prizes.

This is APG's second year as an HSCC sponsor. Hosted in the culinary kitchens at NAIT on March 7, 2026, 17 teams of three students, plus a teacher coach, from 13 high schools in the Edmonton and surrounding area participated. Teams had three hours to prepare a four-course menu consisting of a pulse appetizer, pasta course, main course and dessert.

In the first course, teams showcased a variety of hot or cold appetizers featuring Alberta pulses. The appetizers ranged from a variety of flavours of hummus and dips, sushi, crepes, salad and cakes/patties, and as one of the judges for this course, I can confirm they were all delicious and it was a tough round of scoring! The second course featured spinach and ricotta filled pasta with tomato sauce. The main course included a pan-fried pork chop, mushroom pan gravy, duchess potato and green beans almon-dine. Dessert was a choux pastry with custard filling, fruit sauce and edible garnish.



Seth Botterill and Kerik Slinger from Dr. Anne Anderson High School plate their winning pulse appetizer at the HSCC on March 7. Photo courtesy Jeanette Sesay of JSP Photography



(Left to right) Debra McLennan, APG Food and Nutrition Coordinator, presented the prize to Jordan-Jayde Grunsell, Kerik Slinger and Seth Botterill from Dr. Anne Anderson High School for their winning pulse appetizer at the HSCC Awards Night March 23. Photo courtesy Jeanette Sesay of JSP Photography



Stunning dish of Dahi Vada, Mint Chutney, Sev and Sweet Yogurt from Chef Jiju Paul, Edmonton Expo Centre at Hot Chefs Cool bEATS April 23. Photo courtesy Jeanette Sesay of JSP Photography

Each course was judged blind by a team of three chefs from local area restaurants. Scores were tallied after the competition and kept secret until the awards night. It was a whirlwind day, but so much fun to see what the students created and how they handled the pressure of cooking within strict time limits.

High School Culinary Challenge awards night

The HSCC Awards Night took place on March 23 at NAIT and started with a short reception with appetizer food stations highlighting each sponsor commodity. Creativity was on full display with each station featuring an appetizer created and served by the culinary students that participated in HSCC. After enjoying these delicious appetizers, we adjourned to the auditorium for the awards.

Three culinary scholarships were awarded along with medals to the teams finishing in the top three of Division 1 and 2, plus the award for the best pulse appetizer. Team 2 from Dr. Anne Anderson High School came out on top with their pulse appetizer, Roasted Garlic Red Lentil Hummus served with Brussels Sprouts Hash topped with Zippy Pickled Red Onions. Each member of the team was awarded a Shizu Hamono Shikisai Miyako bunka knife with blade guard and Sharpie pen from Knifewear, and their teacher coach reported how excited they were with their prize. Check out their winning recipe on the next page.



Team APG at Hot Chefs Cool bEATS at the Royal Glenora Club on April 23. (Left to right) Debra McLennan, Gabby Semeniuk, Robert Semeniuk and Erin Walker.

Hot Chefs Cool bEATS

Held April 23 at Edmonton's Royal Glenora Club, Hot Chefs Cool bEATS is the primary fundraising event for the Canadian Culinary Fund and its High School Culinary Challenge scholarship and competition program. This unforgettable evening of culinary excellence and entertainment is a chef-driven food experience that brings together the best of Edmonton's culinary scene to support a great cause. As one of the sponsors, pulses were featured in food creations from Chef Jiju Paul, Edmonton Expo Centre; Chef Paul Shufelt, Hayloft Steak & Fish; Chef Allen Ashley, Royal Glenora Club; and Chef Jason Greene, Braven Restaurant.

The sold-out event raised over \$50,000 and a good time and good eats were had by all. Engaging with the chefs while tasting their dishes provides an opportunity to build connections and exchange ideas that is unique to events like this one.

The last word

Participating in events that put pulses in the hands of future and seasoned chefs is one avenue to achieve our goal of pulses on every plate. Not only are we building important connections in the food industry, but we are also supporting our future food visionaries. They inspire all of us to connect to our food and think outside the box with our everyday, sometimes humble ingredients, like pulses. The future is definitely bright for the food industry and our Alberta pulses. 🌱

Questions about pulse nutrition, recipes or APG programs? Contact APG's Food and Nutrition Coordinator Debra McLennan at (780) 986-9398 ext. 109.