

FROM APPALACHIA TO THE MOON: TRI-COUNTY CAREER CENTER CULINARY TEAM NAMED NATIONAL TOP 10 FINALIST



ADVANCING TO THE FINAL STAGE OF THE NASA HUNCH COMPETITION,
SHOWCASING INNOVATION AND SKILL ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

NELSONVILLE, OH – Tri-County Career Center (TCCC) is proud to announce that its **Culinary Arts program** has reached new heights—literally. TCCC has been selected as one of the top 10 competitors in the nation for the 2025-2026 **NASA HUNCH** (High school students United with NASA to Create Hardware) Culinary Challenge. Student **Jessalynn Bartlett** (Glouster, OH) led the charge by developing a specialized Tex-Mex chicken taco filling. The recipe was designed to meet NASA's incredibly rigorous dietary and nutritional guidelines for astronauts, which require a delicate balance of low sodium, specific caloric density, and high moisture content—all while maintaining the "crave-ability" required to combat the dulled sense of taste often experienced in microgravity.



THE SCIENCE OF FLAVOR

The competition is more than just a cooking contest; it is an exercise in food science and engineering. Students in the culinary arts lab, under the direction of **Chef Katie Mosher, CEC** (Nelsonville, OH), conducted exhaustive nutritional analyses of their recipes. The challenge was to ensure that the flavor, texture, and visual appeal remained world-class while adhering to the strict constraints of space flight.

"Watching Jessalynn and Hallie navigate this process has been incredible. They mastered the **technical demands of recipe development and the precision of nutritional auditing**, ensuring every gram of sodium and spice served a purpose. But the true success lies in their transferable skills: the leadership to take a concept from a local lab to a national top-ten finish, and the teamwork to pivot when the science challenged their creativity. They have proven they can meet a high-stakes goal with the professionalism of seasoned industry experts."-Chef Katie Mosher



LOCAL HEROES GIVE THEIR APPROVAL

Before heading to the national stage, the recipe had to pass a "boots-on-the-ground" test. TCCC invited **local military recruiters and veterans to serve as guest judges** for the initial local competition. These local heroes gave the Tex-Mex filling rave reviews, with several veteran judges noting they "wished this was an official MRE option" during their time in service.

yum!



Local military recruiters and veterans were served by students and enjoyed the Tex-Mex taco recipe for lunch at the Culinary Café on TCCC campus before heading to national competition.



Jessalynn's "Texi-Mexi" Chicken Taco pictured here ready to enjoy and processed for space flight!



DESTINATION: HOUSTON

As a Top 10 finalist, **Jessalynn Bartlett** and her teammate **Hallie Knight** (Logan, OH) will travel with Chef Mosher to the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. With the generosity of the **Nelsonville Elks Lodge & Auxiliary**, as well as the **Nelsonville VFW Post**, whose financial support helped make this trip possible, the team will compete against the other top nine teams from across the United States. During their visit, the team will:

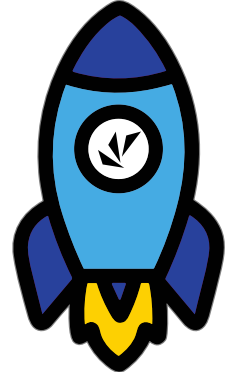
- Present their dish to a panel of **NASA** food scientists & astronauts
- Take an exclusive tour of the Johnson Space Center facilities
- Attend a specialized presentation on **Astronaut Nutrition** & the future of food for deep-space missions



THE ULTIMATE PRIZE

If the TCCC recipe is selected as the grand prize winner, Jessalynn's "**Texi-Mexi**" **Chicken Taco** could be processed for space flight. Future astronauts could find themselves enjoying this taste of Southeast Ohio while orbiting on the **International Space Station**, establishing a base on the Moon, or even during the first manned missions to Mars.

"We are incredibly proud of Jessalynn and Hallie," said Dr. Andrea Townsend, Superintendent at Tri-County Career Center. "Being one of the top 10 programs in the entire country speaks volumes about **the talent of our students and the quality of instruction at Tri-County**. We can't wait to see them represent our community in Houston."



ABOUT TRI-COUNTY CULINARY ARTS

The **Tri-County Career Center Culinary Arts program** transforms students into versatile hospitality professionals through a rigorous curriculum covering culinary arts, baking and pastry, restaurant management, and high-volume catering and banquets. Consistently recognized at the local, state, and national levels, the culinary arts program emphasizes the high-level employability skills, such as leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and time management, which modern employers demand. By **earning multiple industry-recognized certifications**, students significantly increase their marketability within Southeast Ohio's expanding hospitality and tourism sector. Whether engineering food for space flight or managing local events, TCCC graduates enter the workforce prepared to lead in a growing industry. Students interested in learning more, or applying for limited spots for the 2026-2027 school year can learn more or apply at tricitycounty.cc.



ABOUT TRI-COUNTY NASA HUNCH

The NASA HUNCH program is an instructional **partnership between NASA and high schools** across the country. It challenges students to solve real-world problems facing NASA through engineering, textile fabrication, and culinary arts, fostering interest in STEM and space exploration.



Top 10 finalists, Jessalynn Bartlett and her teammate Hallie Knight (pictured) will travel with Chef Mosher to the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.