

EXPOSURE



A TASTE FOR THE CHALLENGE

Dairy contest fuels student innovation

Story by [Fresno State](#)

February 4th, 2025

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When Fresno State business major Suriya Siriphoosit got an opportunity to create a new food product, he thought of the needs of his father and other disabled people whose limited mobility can make eating nutritious food difficult. "My father is paralyzed on his left side. People with low motor skills can easily eat popsicles, so I figured we could create a popsicle that can provide the protein and nutrients people need," Siriphoosit said.

Siriphoosit got the chance to develop this idea and potentially bring his product to market through the Dairy Product Innovation Showcase, a joint project of the [Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#), the [Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology](#), the [California Milk Advisory Board](#) and the [Dairy Business Innovation Initiative](#).

Now in its second year, the Dairy Product Innovation Showcase is a semester-long student competition to create original dairy-based products. Each competing team included entrepreneurship students, who develop the brand and marketing strategy, and food science students, who develop edible sample products in the Fresno State test kitchen.

Product development through the fall 2024 semester culminated in a competition on Dec. 4, when a panel of dairy industry professionals heard brand pitches, taste-tested sample products and evaluated each team's work for flavor, nutritional content and business strategy.

The food was real, and so was the chance to create a profitable business — the top prize in the competition was \$5,000 seed money for further product development, and the second-

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"Two student groups from the competition last year won seed funding, and they are still in business today," said Jarett Margolis, senior manager for business development at the California Milk Advisory Board. "These students now have a semi-commercialized product. They're starting to get industry interest and are working towards sales. The sky's the limit."

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Siriphoosit and his teammates, food science students Marcos Zaragoza and Alyssa Montejano, developed the concept of a nutritious popsicle into their proposed product Pro Pops, which won second place in the competition. (First place went to the team Moo Bites, which developed a shelf-stable, milk-based candy.) In developing Pro Pops, Siriphoosit's team expanded its target market to anyone who needs a nutritious, hydrating snack on the go.

"We wanted to make a food product that is accessible to the disabled, but it's hard to make a product for the medical field. But we also figured out that being healthy is trendy, which will give the product more exposure in the market," Siriphoosit said. "I turned to guerilla marketing. We'd like to set up booths at music festivals where consumers will want to hydrate, creating more value to the consumer."

Collaboration between students with different skills is essential career preparation, said Kelli Williamson, an adjunct professor of food science and nutrition at Fresno State who teaches advanced dairy processing.

"One of the biggest benefits for students is understanding how to build cross-functional relationships," Williamson said. "The dairy industry is looking for employees who can communicate with different teammates and get work done together."



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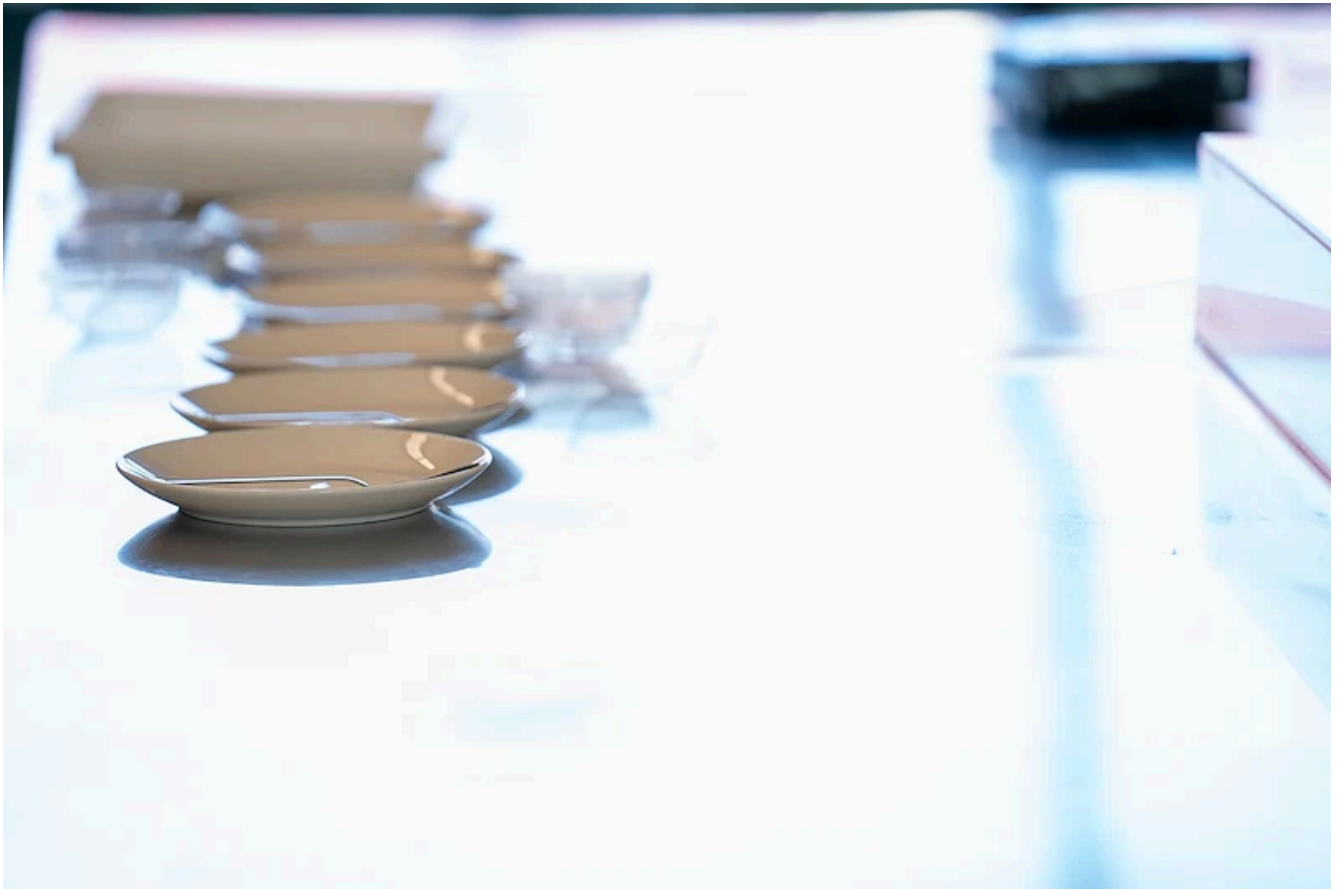


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Business student Jason Sulay, whose Fuel Snacks product won third place, said his collaboration with food science student Priscilla Garcia taught him teamwork in a highly realistic setting. "Working with Priscilla taught me to let go of control. I had no idea you needed all these ingredients just for a yogurt base. So I let Priscilla drive development and looked for where I could help with marketing and pitching, where I'm strong," Sulay said.

Sulay, who graduated at the end of the fall 2024 semester, said the dairy competition was a summation of everything he had learned in business classes. "We had to come up with a business plan, a marketing plan, prices and manufacturing process. It literally encompassed everything I learned throughout my time at Fresno State."



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