



# NELNET

## GAMEDAY GRUB

### 2025 ANNUAL COOKBOOK

A gift from Nelnet Campus Commerce's  
Client Experience Team

We're grateful for your partnership and excited to kick off another winning season together! The 2025 Nelnet Campus Commerce Cookbook is filled with tailgate-inspired favorites, featuring hand-picked recipes to bring warmth, flavor, and joy to every occasion this year.



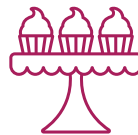
KICKOFF  
SNACKS



MAIN EVENT  
MAINS



SIDELINE  
FAVORITES



SWEET VICTORY  
DESSERTS



CHEERS &  
HIGH FIVES

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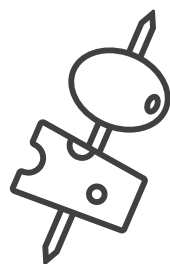
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# KICKOFF SNACKS

Start the game strong with bite-sized favorites that get the crowd going. These quick starters set the tone for every great match, whether you're courtside, rink-side, or tailgating outside the stadium.



# CREAMY CHILI DIP

**PREP TIME:**  
15 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
40 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
9

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Brown ground beef in pan.
2. Add 1 diced jalapeno, garlic powder, onion powder, chili powder, and red pepper flakes to the beef.
3. Drain the cooked beef.
4. Add the beef, beef stock, and tomato paste to a pot.
5. Let the chili simmer and thicken.
6. When cooked to satisfaction, add 1 block of cream cheese and stir until it's a creamy dip texture.
7. Serve with tortilla chips.

## INGREDIENTS:

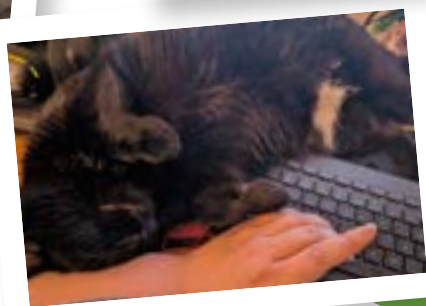
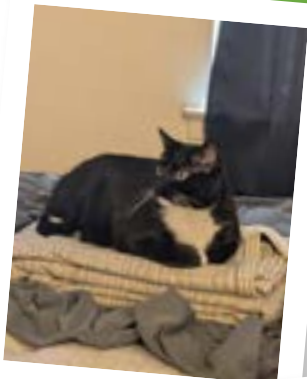
- 1/4 lb. ground beef
- 1 diced jalapeno
- 1 tbsp. onion powder
- 1 tbsp. garlic powder
- 2 tbsp. chili powder
- Red pepper flakes to taste
- 2 cups beef stock
- 16 oz. can of tomato paste
- 1 block of cream cheese
- Bag of tortilla chips

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Delta Thompson

CLIENT SUPPORT ADVISOR

I have just celebrated my three year anniversary in working for the Nelnet High Ed Operations team. My partner, Quinn, and I also just celebrated our four year wedding anniversary in August. We have three cats who we adore as well as a husky. This year was an adventure for me as I moved from Nebraska to New York City. In my free time, I love painting, watching movies, and playing video games.







# INSIDE OUT JALAPEÑO POPPER

**PREP TIME:**  
10 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
2 HOURS ON LOW

**SERVINGS:**  
10

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Seed and dice jalapeños to desired preference.
2. Cook and crumble bacon strips.
3. Combine all ingredients into a crockpot and let sit on low for roughly 2 hours or until well incorporated (stirring occasionally.)

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Joe Pfeiffer**

CLIENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST

I've worked at Nelnet for two and a half years, and all with Higher Ed. I got married at the beginning of November. When I am not working, I enjoy the outdoors by either taking my dog Benny out to play in the park or fishing. When fall comes, I try to go hunting on the weekend when the Huskers are not playing. When I am not outside, I love to watch sports and cook. If I am not doing that, I am either with friends or watching whatever cheesy show just came out that my wife is obsessed with.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 8 oz. cream cheese
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup monterey jack or mozzarella cheese
- 4-6 jalapeños (depending on spice preference)
- 6 slices of bacon
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. onion powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Cracker of choice





# PIZZA DIP

**PREP TIME:**  
5 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
2 1/2 HOURS

**SERVINGS:**  
N/A

## DIRECTIONS:

1. In a slow cooker/crockpot, place the cream cheese, pizza sauce, 1 cup of the shredded mozzarella, shredded parmesan, 3/4 cup of the mini pepperonis, and the Italian seasoning.
2. Place the slow cooker on low for 2 hours. At the 1 hour mark, stir the dip and then place back on low for the remaining 1 hour.
3. After the remaining hour, add the remaining mozzarella over the top of the mixture and place the remaining mini pepperonis across the top of the cheese.
4. Let cook on low for another 30 minutes, until all of the cheese is melted.
5. Serve with breadsticks, crackers, pita, or tortilla chips.

## INGREDIENTS:

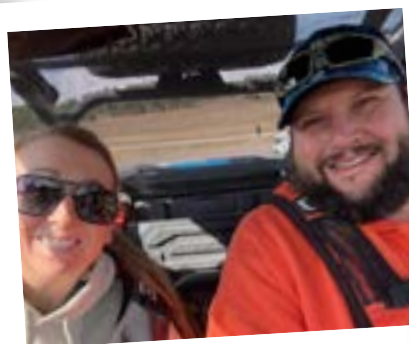
- 8 oz of cream cheese (let sit at room temperature to soften for 30 mins before starting)
- 14 oz jar of pizza sauce
- 2 cups of shredded mozzarella
- 1/2 cup of shredded parmesan
- 1 1/2 cups of mini pepperoni
- 2 tbsp. of Italian seasoning

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Joel Mueller**

CLIENT SUPPORT ADVISOR

Hello! My name is Joel and I have been with Nelnet for almost 15 years. My wife and I have been married over 17 years and have nine (soon to be 11) nieces and nephews that keep us very busy! We also have a three-year-old chocolate lab named Pearl. In my spare time I enjoy many outdoors activities: fishing, camping, hunting, and taking our side-by-side riding different places. I am a NASCAR and dirt track racing fan. I have a massive collection of Earnhardt Sr. and Jr., Ryan Blaney, Austin Dillon, and AJ Allmendinger diecast cars.





# CHIPS AND GUACAMOLE

**PREP TIME:**  
20 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
20 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
16

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut avocados lengthwise, remove pits, and dig out with a spoon. Add to bowl.
2. Squeeze lime juice over the top of avocados.
3. Use a potato masher (or fork) to mash avocados to desired consistency.
4. In the same large bowl, add jalapeño, onion, tomato, and cilantro.
5. Add salt and pepper to bowl.
6. Test seasoning and add more salt or pepper as needed.
7. Chill in the fridge for 15–20 minutes and then serve.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 8 large ripe avocados
- 1 jalapeño
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- 1/2 cup onion, diced
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro
- 3 limes (juiced)
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1/2 teaspoon of pepper

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Maria Kashapata

#### DATA ENTRY SPECIALIST

I have been with Nelnet for a little over a year. I have a love for problem solving, so stepping into the data entry role has allowed me to further my love for helping others. When I'm not working, I love acting and singing. I'm an artist at heart and love expressing my creativity in many forms. I enjoy songwriting, learning new languages, and going to concerts. I also love movies. This year I wanted to learn more about cooking and being creative in the kitchen. I think I really mastered the art of making chips and guacamole. It's my favorite thing to snack on. I hope you enjoy it just as much as I do!







# GAMEDAY NACHO DIP

**PREP TIME:**  
20 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
20 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
N/A

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a skillet over medium heat, cook ground beef until browned. Drain excess fat.
3. Add taco seasoning and water to the beef. Simmer for 5 minutes until thickened.
4. Spread refried beans in the bottom of a 9x13 inch baking dish.
5. Layer the seasoned beef over the beans.
6. Spread sour cream evenly over the beef layer.
7. Add salsa on top of the sour cream.
8. Sprinkle shredded cheddar cheese over the salsa.
9. Top with green onions, black olives, and diced tomatoes.
10. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 minutes or until cheese is melted and bubbly.
11. Serve warm with tortilla chips.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 (15 oz) can refried beans
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup salsa
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup chopped green onions
- 1/2 cup sliced black olives
- 1/2 cup diced tomatoes
- Tortilla chips for serving

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Matthew Valentine

#### CLIENT SUPPORT ADVISOR

I grew up in Hastings, Nebraska and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. I have been part of Nelnet Campus Commerce for 12 years, bringing extensive experience and dedication to client support. A passionate sports fan, I proudly support the Denver Broncos and Nebraska Cornhuskers. Outside of work, I enjoy attending concerts, spending time with friends and family, and relaxing with a good movie





# SWEET HEAT PEPPER DIP

PREP TIME:  
15 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
N/A

SERVINGS:  
4

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Blend 1 cup of Sweet Heat Peppers into relish consistency.
2. Mix in with 2 8 oz. packages of softened cream cheese using a kitchen mixer.
3. You've got yourself a wonderfully addictive addition to any party.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 jar of Sweet Heat Peppers
- 2 8 oz. packages of softened cream cheese

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Russell Bergholz**

CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

Hello! My name is Russell and I've been at Nelnet for over five years and happy with the opportunity to be a client support analyst. In my free time I enjoy cooking, the outdoors, and spending time with my family and friends. I love watching sports as well, Go Big Red!! I also have two golden retrievers.





# BACON SPINACH DIP

**PREP TIME:**  
15 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
25-30 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
8

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In an 8" nonstick skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crispy. 8 minutes. Drain on a paper-towel lined plate, then chop.
2. In a large bowl, stir together cream cheese, mayonnaise, sour cream, garlic powder, and paprika and season with salt and pepper. Fold in chopped spinach, bacon, parmesan, and 3/4 cup of mozzarella.
3. Transfer dip to an 8" heatproof skillet and sprinkle with remaining 1/4 cup mozzarella. Bake until golden and bubbly, 25-30 minutes.
4. Serve with tortilla chips or toasted baguette, as desired.

## INGREDIENTS:

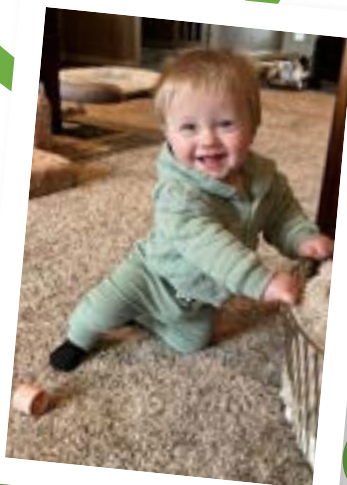
- 10 slices bacon
- 1 (8 oz.) block cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1/3 cup sour cream
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1 lb. frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed of excess liquid
- 1 cup freshly grated parmesan
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella, divided
- Tortilla chips, for serving (optional)
- 1 baguette, sliced and toasted, for serving (optional)

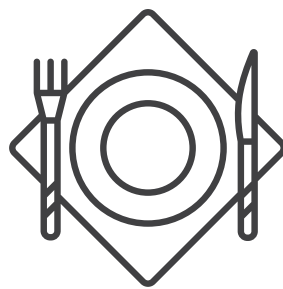
## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Taylor Hill**

TEAM LEAD

I have been with Nelnet for six years and have served as a team lead for the past three. I'm married to my best friend, and together we have a 10-month-old son and a one-year-old golden retriever puppy who keep life exciting! In my free time, I love spending time with my family, traveling, being outdoors, and trying new recipes. This bacon spinach dip is always a hit in our house on game days!





# MAIN EVENT MAINS

Here's where the real competition begins. These standout entrees take center field with bold flavors and hearty servings built to fuel champions, whether you're watching the big game or celebrating a big win at work.





# CHICKEN EMPANADAS

PREP TIME:  
5 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
45 MINUTES

SERVINGS:  
20

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Coat chicken quarters with a bit of lemon juice and season with salt, pepper, and the packet of Sazón.
2. In a pan pour a bit of oil and cook chicken on high heat for about 15-20 minutes or until you start to see color.
3. Add the onions, peppers, a splash of stock and a tablespoon of tomato paste into the pan, mix and simmer on low heat for another 10-15 minutes until fragrant. Start thawing the pastry discs during this step.
4. Let chicken cool for a few minutes and shred by hand or with a fork.
5. Place filling onto the dough and fold over, seal with a fork or by hand.
6. Heat up oil and fry empanadas for about 5-7 minutes or until golden brown.

## INGREDIENTS:

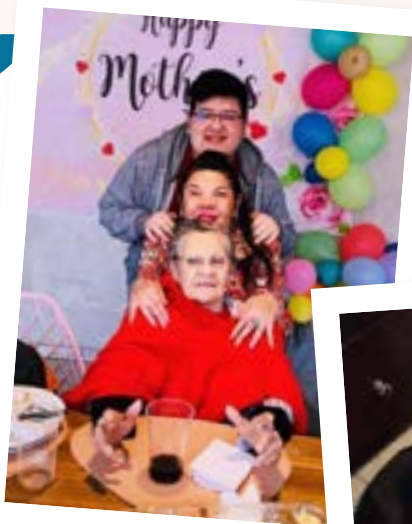
- 4 chicken leg quarters
- 20 empanada/pastry discs
- 1 yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- Oil for frying (we use Canola oil, but this is preference)
- 1 packet of Sazón seasoning
- Chicken stock
- Tomato paste
- Lemon juice

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Brian Gonzalez

#### CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

I'm one of the newest members of the team and it's been a great experience learning all about the role and getting to know my team and clients. It's been a lot to take in but I'm excited for my future at the company. In my free time I like to play video games like League of Legends and Battlefield, watch anime like Jujutsu Kaisen and Chainsaw Man, and spend time with my cats who were all taken in from the wild and happened to choose me.





# SLOW COOKER ITALIAN BEEF

**PREP TIME:**  
20 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
8-10 HOURS ON LOW OR  
HIGH FOR 5-6 HOURS

**SERVINGS:**  
8

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat a large skillet over high heat with 2 tablespoons of canola oil. Add roast and sear each side for 2-3 minutes until it forms a golden seared crust. Place the roast in a slow cooker.
2. Add 2 cups of beef consommé, 1 package of dry Italian salad dressing, 1 package of au jus, 1 teaspoon garlic, 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning and the jar of pepperoncini. Top the roast with 1/2 cup of butter.
3. Cook on low for 8-10 hours or high 5-6 hours. Shred the roast with a fork. Serve how you would prefer.

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Katie Steffen

#### CLIENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST

This is one of my favorite go-to recipes for game day, any gathering or simple weeknight dinner. If you do not like the kick of the pepperoncini's I recommend using sweet pepperoncini's. This is always a hit! We like to use meat to make hoagies, tacos, nachos or having itself with mashed potatoes!

I have been in my current position at Nelnet for over six years and love working with our clients. In our free time we love going for walks and enjoying the outdoors.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 3-4 pounds beef chuck roast
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 cups beef consommé or beef broth
- 1 package dry Italian salad dressing
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon of Italian seasoning
- 1 (12 oz) jar of pepperoncini's
- 1/2 cup of butter
- 1 au jus packet





# TOTCHOS

PREP TIME:  
10 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
15 MINUTES

SERVINGS:  
8

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 425°F. Place the tater tots in an even layer on an 11x17 baking sheet.
2. Bake tots according to package directions, until golden brown and crispy.
3. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, mix sour cream and dressing.
4. Spread sour cream mixture over cooked tater tots. Sprinkle with cheese, bacon, and parsley.
5. Return to the oven for just a couple of minutes, until cheese begins to melt. Serve immediately.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 32 oz tots (enough to fill an 11x17 baking sheet)
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup ranch dressing
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 cup or more shredded cheese (measure with your heart)
- 6 slices bacon cooked, crumbled (again, measure with your heart)

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Laura McCullagh

#### QA AND DATA ENTRY

I've worked at Nelnet for 16 years, and most of those years within the higher ed space. I have two tween girls, both red heads (pray for me), and lately our lives revolve around volleyball. If we aren't chauffeuring between practices, we are at games. When I am not working, we love to spend time at the lake with friends or traveling and making memories. Just this summer, we thought it was a great idea to take all the kids to Destin, FL, so 19 of us loaded up and away we went. Happy to report, all went well despite the size of the group. I can't forget my third four-legged child, Murphy- totally thinks he is a lap dog.

Wishing you a safe, happy holiday season and a wonderful New Year.







# CHILI

**PREP TIME:**  
5 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
1 HOUR

**SERVINGS:**  
10-12

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Dice red onion.
2. Sauté onion and ground beef until meat is browned - do not drain.
3. Combine meat + onion with the rest of the ingredients in a large pot.
4. Cook over low/medium heat for at least 30 minutes to 1 hour

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Maddy Everett

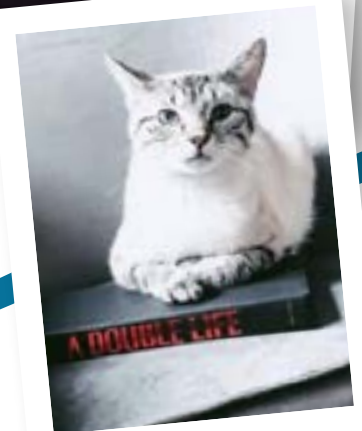
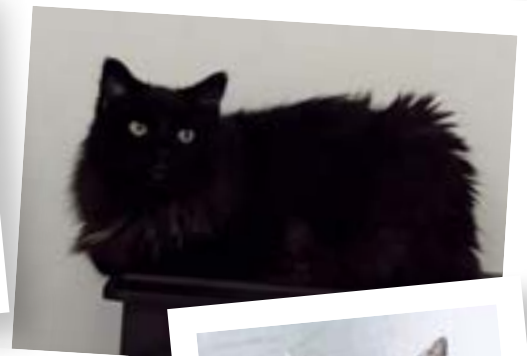
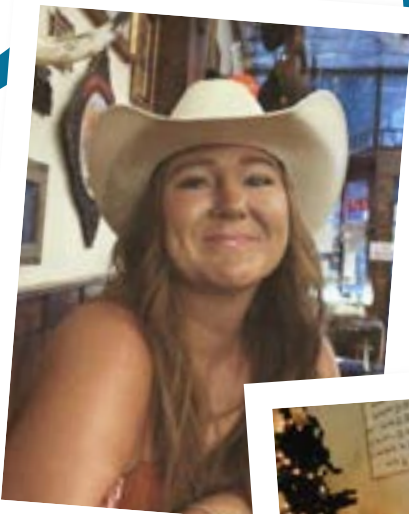
#### QUALITY ANALYST

I've been with Nelnet for about four and a half years. I started out as an account manager, moved up to senior account manager, and transitioned to operations liaison before moving over to the product department. In the product department, I was on the content and training team. At the end of 2024, I returned to operations to join our three-woman QA team.

I was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska, and have lived here ever since, so my love for Husker sports runs deep. GBR! I have two dogs, Louie and Poppy, and three cats, Oliver, Willow, and Coco. I enjoy reading, going on runs, watching all the sports, having game nights with family and friends, and constantly binging all the Harry Potter movies.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 2 lbs 90-93% lean ground beef
- 1 medium red onion
- 1 28 oz can pork and beans
- 2 16 oz cans chili beans
- 2 14.5 oz cans diced tomatoes
- 1 46 fl oz can tomato juice
- Half of a 16 oz jar of tamed jalapeños + juice
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 tablespoons black pepper
- Shredded cheese, sour cream, and crackers as garnishes







# SLIDERS

**PREP TIME:**  
10 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
30 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
12

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat the oven to 350°F.
2. Place 4 tablespoons unsalted butter in a small, microwave-safe bowl and microwave until melted, 20-30 seconds.
3. Without separating the rolls, cut 1 package Hawaiian sweet dinner rolls in half horizontally with a serrated knife. Place the bottom half of the rolls in a 9x12-inch or 7x11-inch baking dish.
4. Arrange 6 slices of the swiss cheese on the rolls, overlapping the slices as needed to completely cover. Fold and arrange 12 thin slices of ham over the cheese, arranging a slice on each roll. Layer the remaining 6 slices swiss cheese over the ham. Place the top half of the rolls over the cheese.
5. Brush the butter onto the top of the rolls, then sprinkle with 1 teaspoon of poppy seeds. Cover the baking dish tightly with aluminum foil.
6. Bake until the sandwich is heated through and the cheese melts, about 20 minutes. Uncover and bake until the rolls are lightly browned, 7-8 minutes.
7. Repeat steps to make a pan with turkey.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 stick of unsalted butter
- 1 package of Hawaiian sweet rolls (King's)
- 12 slices of cheese of choice (we use swiss)
- Deli meat of choice (we use ham and turkey)
- 1 teaspoon poppy seeds

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Marci Mueller

SENIOR MANAGER - CLIENT SUPPORT

This November marks 16 years with Nelnet! My husband and I love spending time outdoors—whether we're at the lake with our lab or out exploring trails on our side-by-side. I also cherish my role as an aunt to my 9 amazing nieces and nephews (with two more on the way!). We love spending time together, from sleepovers and vacations to cheering them on at their various activities.





# EASIEST AIR FRYER SALMON

PREP TIME:  
5 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
10 MINUTES

SERVINGS:  
4

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Dice 2-3 cloves of garlic
2. Preheat air fryer to 400°F for 4 minutes.
3. Whisk soy sauce, maple syrup, sesame oil, olive oil, sriracha, garlic, and red pepper flakes in a small bowl until combined. Taste and add more soy sauce for more Umami flavor or more maple syrup/honey if you prefer it sweeter.
4. Pour the marinade in a Ziploc bag with the salmon and coat all sides. You can let it sit in marinade for 10-15 minutes if you're prepping other dishes, but not necessary.
5. Place your fillets in the air fryer and pour the marinade over the top of the fillets. You're going for a caramelized sauce on the salmon. Add some salt and pepper to taste. Air fry at 400°F for 7-10 minutes, depending on how thick your fillets are. Internal temp. should be 145°F with a meat thermometer. The sauce on top should be sizzling.
6. Top with sesame seeds and sliced green onions, if desired.

## INGREDIENTS:

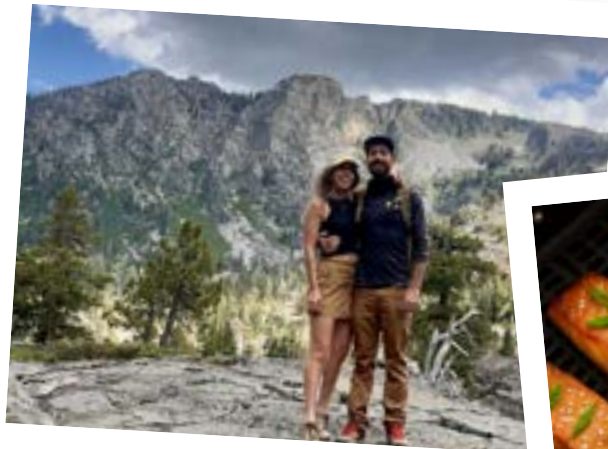
- 2-3 salmon fillets, approximately 15-20 oz of salmon total depending on size of fillets
- 4 tbsp. soy sauce
- 1-2 tsp. maple syrup or honey, more/less to taste
- 1 tsp. sesame oil
- 1 tsp. olive oil/neutral oil of choice
- 1 tsp. of sriracha, omit if you don't like spice
- 2-3 cloves of garlic, diced
- 1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes
- Sesame seeds and green onions, optional for serving

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Sabrina Norris-Turin

#### CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

I'm just now approaching my one year on the client support team and have loved the challenge of learning so many new products. I have a background working on a university campus in New York City, so I really appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with our schools and service students all over the country. Now I'm back in Southern California, where I live with my fiancé and our Lab/Aussie mix, Coco. When I'm not taking multiple walks a day with her (so many walks!), I'm either thrifting, cooking, or canyoneering (depending on the budget!). In California, we tend to love simple food that packs in the protein, so I wanted to share my favorite recipe for an easy weeknight or game-day meal. If you're talented and you want to throw it on the BBQ, go for it! I don't make the rules!



# CAMPUS CONNECT

## Get Ready for **CampusConnect 2026** in Annapolis!

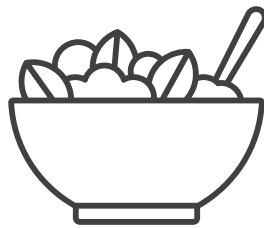
June 1-3, 2026

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# SIDELINE FAVORITES

Every great play needs teamwork, and these sides deliver the perfect support. From fresh and crunchy to warm and comforting, they round out the plate and make every meal a true team effort.





# BUFFALO CHICKEN DIP

**PREP TIME:**  
5 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
15-25 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
12

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine the shredded chicken, cream cheese, hot sauce, ranch dressing, and half of the shredded cheddar cheese.
3. Transfer the mixture to an oven-safe dish.
4. Bake for about 20 minutes, or until heated through.
5. Sprinkle the remaining shredded cheese on top and return to the oven until melted.
6. Serve warm with Fritos Scoops.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1 (8 oz) block of cream cheese
- 1/2 cup Frank's RedHot or your preferred hot sauce
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup ranch dressing
- 1 bag of Fritos Scoops

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Curestin Jones-Smith

SENIOR CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

I've been with Nelnet for nearly four years. I'm married to Jeremy, and we have two wonderful children—our daughter Mya just started her first year of college, and our son Jeremiah is preparing to graduate in May 2026. We truly value our family time and enjoy adventurous activities like ziplining and anything that gets the adrenaline pumping. As we approach the empty nest phase, I'm feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness about what this next chapter will bring.





## #20 ON 20 WINGS

**PREP TIME:**  
10 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
40 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
3-4

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Prepare the wings:
  - In a large bowl, toss the chicken wings with olive oil to coat.
  - Add salt, pepper, minced garlic, and any other seasonings (you can adjust to change flavors.) Toss again to ensure the wings are evenly coated.
2. Prepare the baking pan:
  - Lightly spray a baking sheet with non-stick spray.
  - If you have a raised rack, place the wings on the rack on top of the baking sheet. This helps the juices drain off and promotes even cooking.
3. Bake the wings:
  - Preheat your oven to 400°F.
  - Arrange the wings in a single layer on the baking rack (or directly on the baking sheet if you don't have a rack.)
  - Bake for 40 minutes, flipping halfway through (this step is key for crispiness!)
4. Cool and serve:
  - Once they're golden and crispy, transfer the wings to a large bowl and let them cool for a few minutes.

### INGREDIENTS:

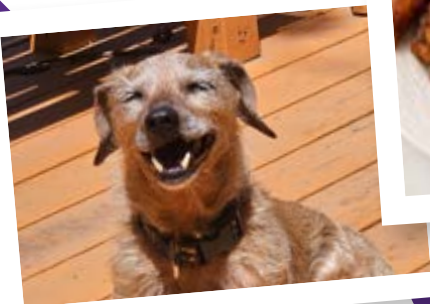
- 2 lbs chicken wings
- Olive oil
- 4-5 garlic cloves, minced store bought is fine
- Couple pinches of seasoning salt
- Couple pinches of black pepper
- Roughly a couple of teaspoons of smoked paprika for color and smokiness
- An amount that speaks to you of Italian seasoning

### FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

## Jerry Donahue

SENIOR CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

I've been with Nelnet for about a year and a half now, and the time has really flown by. Outside of work, I have a senior puppy named Reggie, who's a Dachshund/Cairn terrier mix and my little buddy. I'm also passionate about cooking and competitive gaming. I'm part of a competitive team for Final Fantasy TCG, a card game I absolutely love.





# PRETZEL BITES

**PREP TIME:**  
45 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
15 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
12

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix the dough. Whisk together the warm milk and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Sprinkle the yeast on top and wait 5 minutes for the yeast to foam up and activate.
2. Knead the dough. Add the flour, melted butter, and salt. Then use a spoon to mix everything until combined, and then use your hands to knead the dough for about 4 minutes until it is smooth, adding a bit more flour if the dough is too sticky.
3. Let the dough rise. Transfer the dough to a lightly-oiled bowl, cover with a damp towel, and let the dough rest for 20 to 30 minutes in a warm place until it has doubled in size.
4. Prep oven, baking sheet, and boiling water solution. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 450°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper, then set aside. Combine the water and baking soda in a stockpot or a very large saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
5. Form the pretzel bites. Turn the dough out onto a lightly-oiled work surface and divide into 12 equal pieces. Roll out each piece of dough into even 3/4-inch wide ropes. Use a knife to cut the rope into individual pretzel bites, about 1-inch long each.
6. Boil the pretzel bites. Very carefully, use a spatula to transfer the bites into the boiling water about a dozen or so at a time, for about 30 seconds per batch. Transfer the pretzel bites to the parchment-lined pan, spaced out so that they're not touching, and repeat with the remaining pretzel bites.
7. Add egg wash and salt. Brush the top of each pretzel bite with the egg wash and sprinkle with the coarse sea salt.
8. Bake. Bake until the pretzel bites reach your desired level of golden brown color, about 12-14 minutes. Transfer the baking sheets to a wire cooling rack.
9. Serve warm. These pretzel bites taste best the day they have been baked, and even better hot out of the oven. So serve warm and enjoy!

## INGREDIENTS:

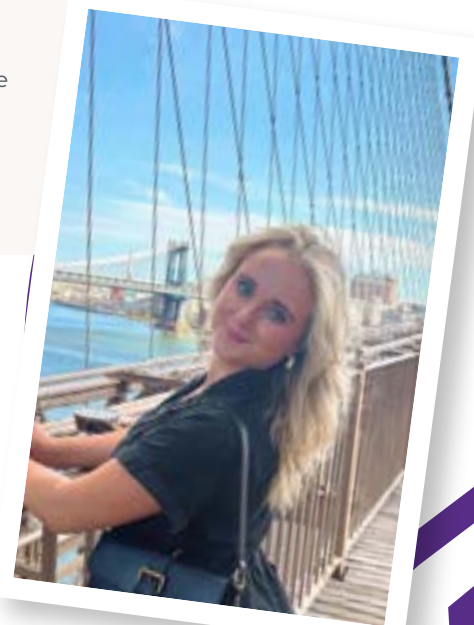
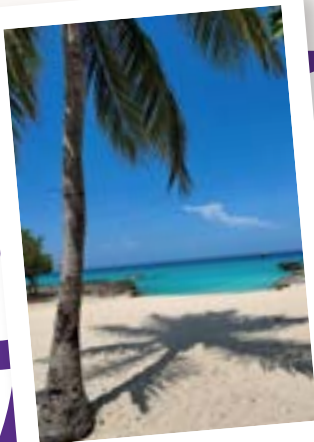
- 1 1/2 cups warm (110 to 115°F) milk or water
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 (0.25 oz) package active dry yeast
- 4 1/2 cups all purpose flour, plus more if needed
- 2 tablespoons melted butter, plus extra for brushing
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 9 cups water
- 1/3 cup baking soda
- 1 large egg (whisked with 1 tablespoon water)
- Pretzel salt or coarse sea salt, for sprinkling

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Maggie Hetzel

#### QUALITY ASSURANCE ANALYST

I've been working with Nelnet since May of 2023 and I have really enjoyed being part of such a supportive and collaborative team. When I am not working, I love playing volleyball, going for runs and traveling. This year I was lucky enough to visit Grand Cayman in the Caribbean and New York City—both trips were incredible!





# TAILGATE MAC AND CHEESE

**PREP TIME:**  
15-20 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
20-25 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
8

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and lightly grease a baking dish with butter or nonstick spray.
2. In a large pot, bring water and 2 cups of milk to a boil with 1 tablespoon of butter.
3. Add elbow macaroni and cook until al dente (about 6-7 minutes).
4. Drain and set aside.
5. In the same pot, melt 3 tbsp. butter over medium heat.
6. Whisk in 3 tbsp. flour to form a roux.
7. Slowly add remaining milk (about 2 cups) and whisk until smooth.
8. Stir in seasonings: salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, and mustard powder.
9. Simmer until slightly thickened.
10. Reduce heat to low and stir in sharp cheddar and colby jack until melted.
11. Add 1 cup heavy cream for extra richness.
12. Fold in cooked macaroni until fully coated.
13. Transfer mixture to the prepared baking dish.
14. Optional: Sprinkle extra shredded cheese on top for a golden crust.
15. Bake for 20-25 minutes, until bubbly and lightly browned. Serve.

## INGREDIENTS:

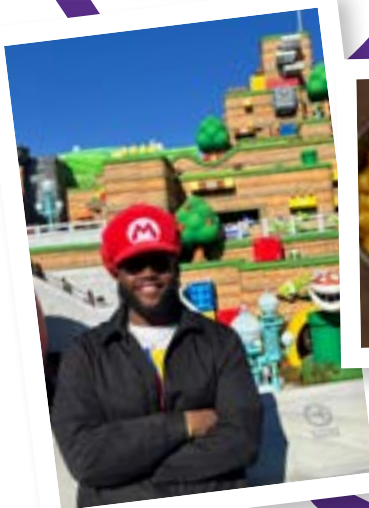
- 1 lb elbow macaroni
- 4 cups whole milk (for boiling pasta and sauce)
- 3 tbsp. butter
- 3 tbsp. all-purpose flour (for roux)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese (shredded)
- 1 cup colby jack cheese (shredded)
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. onion powder
- 1/2 tsp. paprika
- 1/2 tsp. mustard powder

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

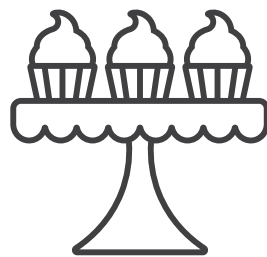
**Noel Ogbankiti**

SENIOR CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

Mac and Cheese is my favorite dish all year round! On a good game day, you can never go wrong with a huge plate of mac and cheese. A little bit about me—I joined Nelnet Campus Commerce a year ago, I'm a big fan of traveling, and I love the outdoors and working out. I'm always down to go eat, watch sports, and just spend time with friends.







# **SWEET VICTORY DESSERTS**

Celebrate the scoreboard's best numbers, dessert style. These sweet finishes reward every player for a game well played, turning any meal into a championship moment.



# FOOTBALL RICE KRISPIE TREATS

**PREP TIME:**  
40 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
N/A

**SERVINGS:**  
12

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine the mini marshmallows, butter and mini chocolate chips in a large microwave-safe bowl. Microwave, stirring every 20 seconds, until the butter and chocolate are melted; stir to combine.
2. Pour in the cocoa rice cereal and stir until coated.
3. Spray your hands with cooking spray, then shape the rice cereal mixture into twelve 4-inch footballs on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Let cool, then pipe on laces and stripes with vanilla frosting.

## INGREDIENTS:

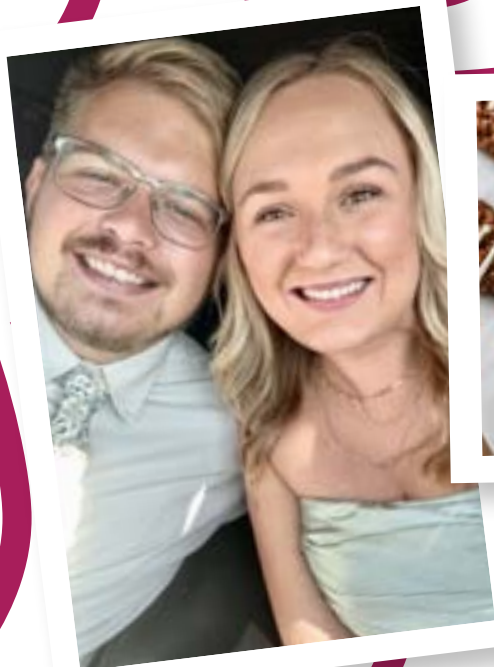
- 1 10-ounce bag mini marshmallows
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup mini chocolate chips
- 7 cups cocoa rice cereal
- Cooking spray
- Vanilla frosting

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Anna Harrington**

CLIENT SUPPORT ADVISOR

I've been part of Nelnet's customer support team for almost four years. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with friends and family, going to the lake, working on home renovations, and grabbing a good coffee. We also have a dog, Kona, who we absolutely adore. My husband, Glen, and I love hosting—especially during Husker football season. Hope you enjoy the football-themed Rice Krispie treats!





# PUPPY CHOW

**PREP TIME:**  
5 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
10 MINUTES + 20 MINUTES COOL

**SERVINGS:**  
N/A

## DIRECTIONS:

1. In a microwave-safe mixing bowl, combine the chocolate chips, peanut butter, and butter.
2. In your microwave, heat the mixture in 30-second increments, stirring in between, until completely melted. Microwave until the chocolate is fully melted, but do not overcook or the chocolate may burn. (approx. 1.5-2 minutes, microwaves may vary)
3. Stir or whisk in the salt and vanilla until smooth.
4. Place the chex cereal in a large mixing bowl and pour chocolate mixture on top. Softly stir together until all the cereal is completely coated. Set aside to cool slightly. You want the chocolate coating to be sticky, not runny or dry.
5. Place the powdered sugar in a large ziplock bag. Add the chocolate coated cereal to the ziplock bag, seal it and then shake it to coat evenly.
6. Line a sheet pan with a piece of parchment or wax paper. Empty the cereal onto the sheet and separate. Place it in the fridge to set for about 20 minutes.

## INGREDIENTS:

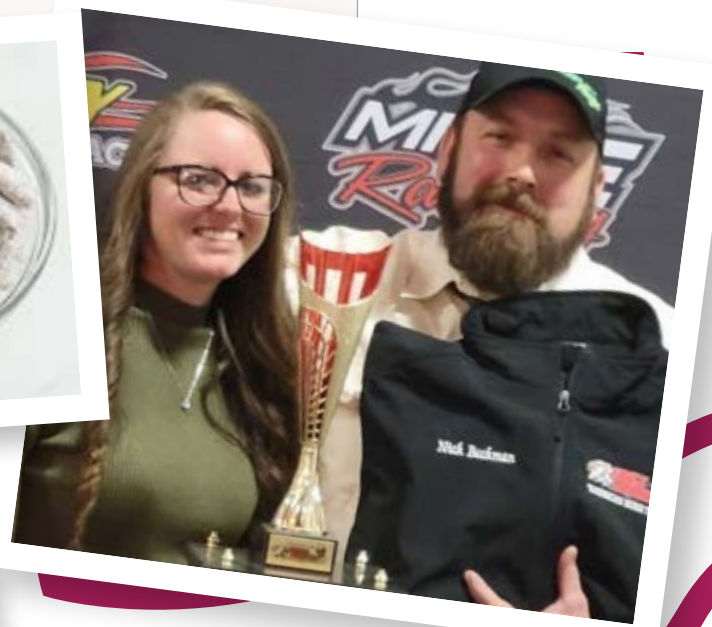
- 12 oz box rice chex cereal
- 12 oz bag semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3/4 cup peanut butter
- 1 stick unsalted butter (1/2 cup)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 lb bag powdered sugar

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Brielle Buske**

CLIENT SUPPORT ADVISOR

This coming spring, I will celebrate five years with Nelnet, all with the higher ed operations team. My boyfriend and I will also celebrate our 10-year anniversary in just a few months. We have a blended family with three kids and two pups. During the summer, you can find us at the local racetrack. When it's not race season, we try to take as many trips as we can. This year, we went to Tennessee and Florida; both were a first time for all of us.





# OREO BALLS

**PREP TIME:**  
APPROX. 1.5 HOURS

**COOK TIME:**  
N/A

**SERVINGS:**  
24

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Add Oreos to food processor and grind until fine
2. If you do not have a food processor, put Oreos in Ziplock bag and roll with a rolling pin until crushed finely
3. Mix Oreo crumbs with block of cream cheese until completely mixed and no crumbs remain
4. Use about two tbsps. worth of mixture to form into balls, repeat until the mixture is all gone
5. Refrigerate for an hour
6. Melt almond bark according to directions on package
7. Dunk the Oreo balls into the almond bark until fully coated and let dry
8. Melt chocolate chips according to directions on package
9. Drizzle the almond bark covered Oreo balls with chocolate

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 regular pack of Oreos
- 1 block of cream cheese
- Almond bark
- Chocolate chips

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Connor Freeman

#### DATA ENTRY SPECIALIST

Hi all! My name is Connor Freeman and I have been with Nelnet for a little over two years now. I was born and raised in Nebraska, which means I'm a die-hard Husker fan. The season isn't over yet, but next year is our year for sure. I moved to Boston, MA, for no reason in particular last year, meaning I'm also a major Red Sox fan! I love getting to work with so many of our schools and clients throughout the year and I'm excited to work with even more in 2026! I hope you enjoy the recipe!







# BEST BANANA BREAD

PREP TIME:  
15 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
1 HOUR

SERVINGS:  
8

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Make a bowl/mix of the white sugar, dark brown sugar, and a splash of vanilla or cinnamon.
2. Make a bowl/mix of the baking soda, baking powder, and teaspoon of salt.
3. Make a bowl/mix of the cup of flour, milk, and chocolate chips.
4. Mix all the ingredients into one big bowl and pour into a baking pan.
5. Bake at 350°F for one hour.

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

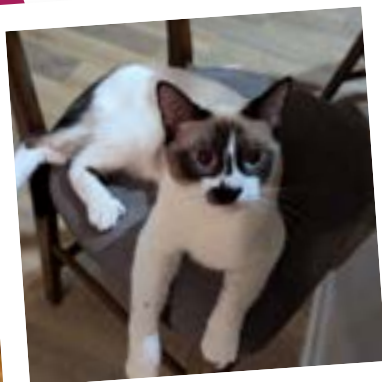
**Daniel Perez**

ACCOUNT MANAGER

I like to be fitness oriented! I run two 5ks a month and spend time with friends and family. I am an avid movie watcher, and I paint when I get the chance! I make this banana bread recipe with my partner on cold winter days with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate as a treat!

## INGREDIENTS:

- 3 ripe bananas
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar
- Splash of vanilla/cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1/2 cup milk
- Chocolate chips to your heart's desire





# TOUCH DOWN TRIFLE

**PREP TIME:**  
10 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
30 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:**  
ABOUT 10

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Prepare the pudding: Follow the instructions on the instant pudding box. Once done, set it aside in a bowl to cool in the fridge while you start on the cake.
2. Bake the cake: Follow the instructions on the chocolate cake mix box. Bake it at the recommended temperature and time. Since it'll be broken up, the texture doesn't need to be perfect.
3. Thaw Cool Whip: If Cool Whip is frozen, let it thaw either in the fridge or on the counter until it's soft and creamy.
4. Cool the cake: Once the cake has finished baking, let it cool in the fridge for about 5-10 minutes to make it easier to break apart.
5. Prepare the serving dish: Choose your desired bowl or trifle dish for layering.
6. Layer the dessert.
  - First layer: Break the cake into chunks and spread it in the bottom of the bowl, about an inch thick.
  - Second layer: Add the chocolate pudding, spreading it evenly to be about an inch thick.
  - Third layer: Add a layer of Cool Whip about 1/2 to 1 inch thick.
  - Repeat the layers until all ingredients are used up.
7. Chill and serve: Once all layers are done, refrigerate the dessert until ready to serve. The longer it sits, the better the flavors meld! This recipe is fun because you can always switch it up and add toppings of your liking into your layers such as Oreos or Snickers bars, and you can even switch the flavors of the cake and pudding and add fresher ingredients such as fruit.

## INGREDIENTS:

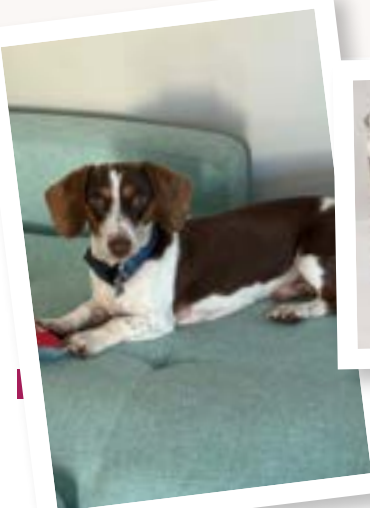
- 1 box chocolate cake mix of choice
- 2 boxes chocolate pudding mix of choice
- Milk for both the cake and pudding
- Eggs
- Water
- Vegetable oil
- 2 containers of Cool Whip

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Jeleana DeFranzo**

CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

I've worked at Nelnet for two years. I have two amazing children, ages seven and four, and a very rambunctious mini Dachshund named Jerald. We focus our time on family fun and travel. When I am not assisting our wonderful clients, I enjoy visiting movie filming locations, spending time with my kids, traveling, frequenting the park, and trying new recipes and restaurants. Happy holiday season!





# CROCK-POT LAVA CAKE

PREP TIME:  
15 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
3 HOURS

SERVINGS:  
12

## DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large bowl, combine the cake mix, water, eggs and oil; beat on low speed for 30 seconds. Beat on medium for 2 minutes. Transfer to a greased 4-qt. slow cooker.
2. In another bowl, whisk milk and pudding mix for 2 minutes. Let stand until soft-set, about 2 minutes. Spoon over cake batter; sprinkle with chocolate chips. Cover and cook on high for 3-4 hours or until a toothpick inserted in cake portion comes out with moist crumbs. Serve warm, with whipped cream if desired.

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Rebecca Picraux**

QUALITY ASSURANCE ANALYST

I have been with Nelnet for about 10 years, the last six have been with the higher ed team, first as an account manager and now as a quality assurance analyst. I'm also a mama of two amazing kids, an almost four-year-old girl and almost one year old boy. In the tiny amount of free time I have, I love gardening and doing anything outdoors.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 package devil's food cake mix (regular size)
- 1-2/3 cups water
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 1/3 cup canola oil
- 2 cups cold 2% milk
- 1 package (3.9 oz) instant chocolate pudding mix
- 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips
- Whipped cream, optional





# DUNKAROO DIP

**PREP TIME:**  
5 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
30-60 MINUTES (CHILL TIME)

**SERVINGS:**  
6

## DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large mixing bowl, add the box of cake mix, Cool Whip, and vanilla yogurt. Stir well with wooden spoon until fully combined.
2. Cover with plastic wrap or cling wrap and put in refrigerator for at least 30 minutes to an hour.
3. Add some sprinkles and serve with animal crackers (preferably Teddy Grahams). Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 box Funfetti cake mix
- 2 cups light Cool Whip
- 1/2 cup vanilla yogurt
- Sprinkles (optional)

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

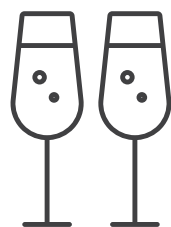
### Travis White

CLIENT SUPPORT ANALYST

Aside from cooking up recipes that provide your weekly sugar intake, I'm a husband and a father of two; a one-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl. We have three cats; Salem, Dinah, and Scout and a German shepherd/Basset hound puppy named Roz. At night when I clock out with Nelnet, I work with my local fire department as a firefighter and medical first responder, and also own a 3D printing company, Level Up 3D Printing, with my brother. The holiday season is always my favorite (aside from the cold) mainly due to our yearly holiday party called Dipsmas where all our family and friends get together and bring a homemade dip to add to the menu. It was only appropriate that the recipe that I prepared is also a dip that was featured at Dipsmas 2023. Have a Happy Holiday!







# CHEERS & HIGH FIVES

Take a time-out with drinks made for every fan in the stands. From cool sips to cozy pours, these refreshments keep spirits high and the celebration going long after the final whistle.



# RUDOLPH'S TIPSYPUNCH

PREP TIME:  
5 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
N/A

SERVINGS:  
N/A

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine all the ingredients in a large pitcher or punch bowl. Stir well.
2. Serve over ice and garnish with cranberries or maraschino cherries and/or a rosemary sprig.

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

### Patti Mufferi

#### DIRECTOR OF CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Every December, just before the holiday rush begins, my sister and I kick off the season with a cozy celebration at her home in Delaware. It's become a cherished tradition, a chance to gather family and friends under one roof, share laughter, and savor the warmth of good company. The house hums with holiday cheer, the aroma of delicious food fills the air, and glasses clink as everyone settles in for a night of festive fun.

My role? I'm the mixologist, the curator of the drink menu. Each year, I bring a little magic to the party with cocktails that sparkle as much as the lights on the tree. But there is one drink that steals the show every time: Rudolph's Tippy Punch. It is bright, merry, and just the right amount of mischievous, a true crowd-pleaser that keeps spirits high and conversations flowing.

For us, this isn't just a party, it's a celebration of togetherness, a toast to the season, and a reminder that the best holiday memories are made with the people we love most.

Happy holidays from my family to yours!

## INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups orange juice, chilled
- 3 cups cranberry juice, chilled
- 2 cups 7up, ginger ale or Sprite
- 1.5 cups vodka, chilled
- 1/2 cup maraschino cherry juice chilled, can substitute cherry juice
- 1 large fresh lemon juice, about 1/4 cup





# TAILGATE TORNADO

PREP TIME:  
10 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
N/A

SERVINGS:  
N/A

## DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large punch bowl or drink pitcher, combine all the ingredients.
2. Add ice right before serving so it doesn't water down the drink. Stir.
3. Serve!

## INGREDIENTS:

- 750 mL Chuckle Rum
- 750 mL vodka
- 46 oz can of pineapple juice
- 52 oz bottle of Simply Lemonade
- 1.25 liter bottle of Sprite or Sprite Zero
- Garnish with sliced lemons and/or pineapples

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Cheryl Davis**

### CLIENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST

I've worked at Nelnet for 23 years, the last 12 with the higher ed customer support team. I love my fur babies, Blue (10) and Casserole (three). Casserole likes to join my meetings. When I'm not at work, I enjoy watching movies, attending live concerts, going to hockey games, and hanging out with my family. I also love finding new places to eat breakfast food, any time of day. Love a good 24-hour diner. Happy holidays!





# APPLE CIDER SANGRIA

**PREP TIME:**  
10 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:**  
N/A

**SERVINGS:**  
8

## DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large pitcher, combine the cider, wine, brandy, and triple sec.
2. Add in the fruit and cinnamon stick.
3. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours (or overnight).
4. Serve over ice.

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

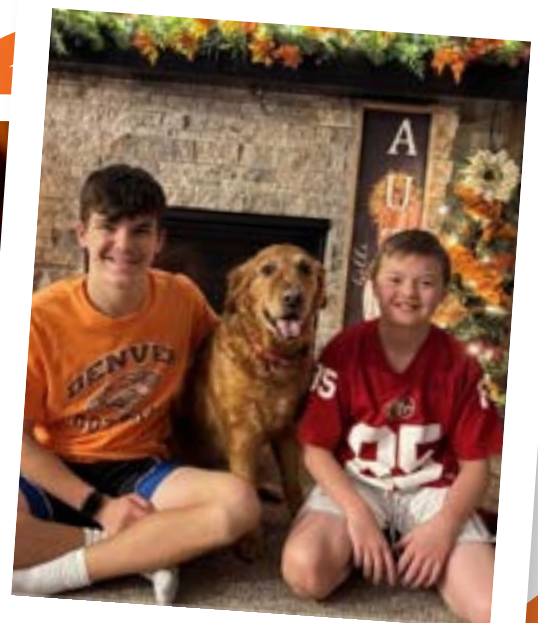
**Julie Mueller**

### CLIENT SUPPORT TRAINER

I am the client support trainer and have been with Nelnet since May 2023. My husband Jason and I have two busy boys and our golden retriever Murphy, who is convinced he is the favorite of the three. Adam (15) and Gage (11) keep us running constantly with the sports and activities that they love. We don't see much free time throughout the year, but when we do you can usually find us out golfing, planning our next adventure, or watching a variety of sports in person and on TV. We are a divided household of 49er and Bronco fans but always come together to cheer on our Huskers!

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 bottle of wine (red or white, your preference)
- 1/2 cup brandy
- 2 cups apple cider, unfiltered
- 1/4 cup triple sec
- 1 apple sliced, Granny Smith or Honeycrisp
- 1 pear, sliced, optional
- 1 orange, sliced
- 1/2 cup cranberries, fresh
- 1 cinnamon stick







# SPARKLING SUNRISE

PREP TIME:  
2 MINUTES

COOK TIME:  
N/A

SERVINGS:  
1

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Add equal parts orange juice and sparkling wine (or alternative) to a glass.
2. Gently pour in the grenadine.
3. Garnish with your choice of fruit and serve.

## INGREDIENTS:

- Sparkling wine
- Orange juice
- Grenadine
- Fruit garnish (optional)

## FROM THE KITCHEN OF:

**Dana Keedy**

CLIENT SUPPORT TEAM LEAD

It's funny that this recipe mentions sunrise—these days, I've been catching plenty of them thanks to my newest (and tiniest) alarm clock. Four months ago, I was blessed with a beautiful baby girl who's completely flipped our world in the best way possible.

