



Suggestion For A Successful Cookoff By the American Chuck Wagon Association

Combining your cookoff with another event, like a county fair, ranch rodeo, stock show, etc. is helpful for a successful event. Ask your Chamber of commerce or other civic clubs to help with your cook off. It would be better to keep the cookoff small, ten (10) wagons or less. You can accept more wagons the following year.

When you set your date, contact Bobby Newton with Rope Burns magazine (580-389-5350) to have your event listed. This publication is read by most of the chuck wagon cooks. The ACWA Newsletter would be happy to list your event. Advertise your event by flyers, newspaper, radio and television. Distributing flyers at other cook off events helps you reach those that don't subscribe to Rope Burns or the ACWA.

Send out invitations to the wagons at least two months in advance of the cookoff. The ACWA can furnish you a mailing list of members. Identify your cut-off date in the invitation. Approximately a week after your cut-off date, send a welcome invitation/information packet to the wagons. Suggestions to include in your packet are: directions to the event, an itinerary including times such as set-up, judging and serving time, a list of motels, B&B's and RV parks with phone numbers and address. Try and arrange a discount rate for these facilities.

Sponsorship of wagons helps keep costs down. Sponsorship can work in several ways. One way is to have a sponsor pay \$200 for five (5) meal tickets for the wagon sponsored. Another possible solution is having the sponsor paying \$500 and receiving forty (40) meal tickets. Prices of meal tickets usually cost from \$8 to \$15. Remember to acknowledge sponsors. This can be done in several ways: small billboard at the event, if you have a catalog for your event and the local newspaper are recommended. Placing small signs at each wagon helps identify who and where the wagons are from as well as the sponsor.

To draw wagons for your event, you should have at least \$5000 in prize money. Suggestions for distributing these funds is paying at least three (3) places for each food in competition, wagon authenticity/camp and overall winners. Overall prize money is for the camp that has the highest sum of wagon/camp and foods. A suggested ratio for calculating overall scores is 60% for food and 40% for wagons. Another way is to pay for overall food and the wagons, not combining the scores. Prize money should be paid for each food item you ask the wagons to cook.

Typically, meat, potatoes, beans, bread and dessert are prepared. Most cooks prefer that all wagons cook the same thing type food. For example, chick fried steak or roast, cobbler or fried pies, but not the cook's choice. Cooking the same type of food makes the food judging fairer and easier for the judges. Ask your local grocery stores and wholesale food businesses for donations of food for the cookoff. The following is needed to serve forty (40) people and the wagon crew and is suggested to distribute:

5# beans	15-20# potatoes
1 gallon cooking oil	4# onions
15-20# flour	dozen eggs
4# sugar	2# butter
1 ½ gallon milk	20-25# meat
Lots of ice	5 gallons bottle water for cooking

Pick a nice grassy spot to set up wagons, allowing about 35-40 feet per wagon. If possible, soil conditions should be suitable for digging and driving stakes. A real help to the wagon crews is to have a back hoe or jack hammer available for digging fire pits-especially in rocky soil. If possible, provide vehicle parking close to the wagons. Trailer parking can be further away. Furnish plenty of porta potties and trash barrels-remember to keep these serviced. Cleanup water should be near the wagons. If you are short on hydrants, water wagons that come around several time a day to keep water barrels full.

You will need volunteers. A good source is 4-H, FFA, FHA and other youth groups are a great assets. It's helpful to the wagons if the volunteers can collect meal tickets and hand out plates and "silverware" at the wagon and serve ice tea. Setting up tables in the center of the wagon circle to serve ice tea cuts down on the congestion at each wagon.

Schedule a cooks meeting the night before the competition. Use this time to explain your agenda and answer questions. A printed handout of the requirements is helpful. This is also a good time to pass out non-perishable groceries. Discuss when and where awards will be presented and when food for judging will be picked up.

Blind food judging of each food item is preferred by most cooks. Food judging should be away from the wagons and any interference. Have volunteers pick up food samples at the wagons. A golf cart is very helpful in picking up the samples. It's suggested that you have 2-4 judges per each food category. The judges shouldn't be allowed to visit wagons until after they have finished judging. If there is a tie, use the same judges to break the tie.

You will need 2-3 wagon judges. These persons need to have a good knowledge of wagons and chuck wagons. It is suggested that each judge inspect the wagon alone, not in a group. The judges should be asked to stay away from the wagons until judging time. The ACWA can help you with a list of wagon judges and wagon judging guidelines as well as score sheets.

Visit the local Health Department asking about their requirements. Each wagon should have Clorox for disinfecting rinse water and sanitizing hands and a thermometer for monitoring food safety temperatures. Serve the public right after the judging food has been picked up and only for one hour.

For more information, contact the ACWA at: cook-off@chuckwagon.org