

Suggestions for a Successful Chuck Wagon Cook Off

The American Chuck Wagon Association wants your event to be successful. Below are a few suggestions you may want to consider when organizing your event.

First of all, you will need a large number of volunteers to have a successful cook off. Get your Chamber of Commerce or civic clubs involved to help with the cook off. Combining your cook off with another event, like a county fair, rodeo, stock show, etc. is very helpful.

Planning:

- What is the purpose of the cooking? For example, raising money for charity or for profit? When talking to potential sponsors it is important to tell them exactly how their money is needed.
- Establish committees
 - Event Chairperson/Co-chairperson
 - Sponsor Committee
 - Site Committee
 - Wagon Committee
 - Food Committee
 - Awards Committee
- Estimate how many people you think will attend so you can determine the number of wagons you will need and whether you have enough space for that number of wagons (space size will be discussed later). Try to keep the number of meals a wagon has to prepare to 50 or less. Also figure on one wagon having to drop out at the last minute due to an unforeseeable issue.
- Set the date for the event and notify ACWA as soon as possible so it can be placed on the ACWA website. With new events popping up there could be an issue of two events on the same weekend or close to one another which would possibly reduce the number of wagons as many may have already committed to another event.
- Sponsors – try to have a banner with the sponsors listed to display at the event. Sponsors should also be included on any flyers you may print and display in many of the local businesses, hotel/motels, and convenience stores.
- Budget – advertising, awards (\$300, \$200, \$100 for prize money for six categories along with and overall prize money and sometimes a belt buckle), any travel or show up money per wagon, food, paper goods, cleanup (extra dumpsters, disposal of grease, ashes and dish washing water), port-a-potties, site cleanup in case of rain and rutting up grounds getting wagon out, compensation and possible lodging (one night) for the wagon judges.
- Will the event be a competition or a benefit? Competitions will have both wagon and food judging.
- If a competition, what food items will be judged?
 - Meat, beans, bread, potatoes, dessert
 - Any local items: Vidalia, GA does an onion dish
- Check with the local fire department concerning a possible burn ban and what they will require. For example:

- Possible fire boxes for cooking.
- 5 lb. fire extinguisher in each camp.
- Will local fire marshal need to inspect any propane equipment that might be used for heating dish washing water? If so, when this will need to do?
- Check with the local Health Department early
 - What permits will be required?
 - Cost of Permits
 - What restrictions will they require?
 - Do they need a copy of wagons food handler certificate? If so, by when and :
 - do they need one from each team member, or
 - only one per team?
 - Will they do an inspection of the wagon camps and cooking/dishwashing setups?
 - If so, what day/time so the teams can have their cooking/dishwashing setup.
- Advertising
 - Send out your chuck wagon invitation/registration at least three months in advance of your cook off. If you join ACWA as an Event Membership (\$100/year), ACWA will send out up to three pages of your event information/registration to all ACWA members. It will also be advertised on the ACWA website along with the ACWA Facebook page. When a wagon returns their entry, it is recommended you email them confirming their registration. In the initial communication, providing information on a list of motels, B & B's and RV parks is appreciated. If possible, get a motel to provide a discounted block of rooms for the wagon teams. A map to the cook offsite and lodging is very helpful and appreciated.
 - Advertise in the local paper along with placing flyers in the local business.
- Awards
 - Are you going to do awards for the different categories/places or just give increased show up money so everyone gets the same amount?
 - If doing awards it is recommended to do at least 3 places in each food category, at least two in wagon, and one over all.
 - Will an overall award be given?
 - What type of awards will be given?
- Schedule the wagon judging, food judging and awards as well as other entertainment or activities. If possible have other activities going on to entertain the public until the meal is served
 - Options for when to hold the wagon and food judging
 - Different day
 - On the same day
- Water for the wagons- recommend supply cooking water as local water supply and garden hoses can have result in a taste issue with some of the food. Remember you want to provide the public with a good tasting meal for your event to be successful.
- Toilet facilities with handwashing
 - Adequate for attendees
 - Close to where the wagons will be set up
- Event invitation

- If you want ACWA to mail out your event's information to the ACWA membership, it is recommended you send it to ACWA about 4 months out so it can be sent out to the ACWA Membership, posted on the ACWA Facebook page, placed in the monthly updates that go to the membership along with in the quarterly ACWA newsletter *Under the Fly*.
- Information should contain the dates, location, entry fees required, entry deadline, set up date/time, number of people the wagons will be cooking for and any special wagon and food judging rule.

Site:

- Room for the expected wagons, judging tents and eating area. If possible, the eating area needs to be covered and have tables and chairs for attendees to sit while eating.
- Parking for the public, wagon trailers (keeping in mind that some of the trailer will be large and some chuck wagon members will want to stay in them) and some owner and/or team members will have motor home.
- Mark out the different wagon sites leaving some room in between the wagon sites so that the wagons are not crowded
 - Wagon site size – recommend at least 30' X 50', but if you have the room 40' X 60' gives more room and helps the public be able to see each wagon camp better. Remember this is also a chance for the public to be able to see a part of history.
- Someone to meet the wagons and direct them to their sites.
- Security for the wagon
- Plan for disposal of oil, gray water, and ashes (if necessary)

Wagon Judging:

- Wagon Judging rules
- Number of wagon Judges – recommend three, can use two, and recommend they are experienced. Each of the wagon's owners have put a lot of time and money into their wagon and using experienced wagon judges can reduce some potential issues. If you want experienced wagon judges you're going to have to provide reasonable compensation along with possible motel room for one night.
- Wagon Judges
 - Judges briefing
 - Judges' tools
 - Wagon and Camp Score Sheet – ACWA can provide you with a sample which you can copy the number you will need.
 - Clipboards
 - Writing instruments
 - Calculators
 - Tabulation Team – if possible get someone who works at a bank and is good at using a 10 key adding machine and/or computer for data entry from the judging sheets best to have three so they can check one another to ensure results are correct. ACWA can provide an Excel spreadsheet with tabulations for both wagon, individual food categories and overall winner (50% wagon score and 50% food scores).

Food Judging:

- Number of people the wagons are cooking for
 - Public, judges, and team must be included
- Event food
 - How much food will be required?
- Quantity of food items to prepare 50 meals
 - 50 - 4 oz. eye of the round cutlets tenderized one way – boxed/bagged in this quantity.
 - 6 lbs. Pinto Beans
 - 25 lbs. Flour
 - 2 – 4 lbs. Sugar
 - 2 dozen Eggs
 - 3 gallons Milk
 - 4 lbs. Unsalted butter
 - 16 lbs. Potatoes (2 - 8lb bags)
 - 6 lbs. Onions (2 – 3lb bags)
 - 3 - #10 cans of sliced peaches (better to have plenty of peaches than people trying to find a peach in their cobbler)
 - 3 – 1 gal Vegetable Oil (128 oz. per gal)
 - 1 case of bottled water for the wagon team to drink
 - 10 gals bottled water for cooking
 - 4 lbs. coffee
- Acquiring food from vendors
- Refrigeration for the food that needs to be kept cold
- Separating food for the different wagons
- Ice for the wagons to keep food cold

Cooks' Meeting

- What time is the food sample to be picked up? Most of the time it is about 10-15 minutes before serving time, so wagon teams do not have to hold the food very long.
- What time is the meal served to the ticket holders? Most of the time it is immediately after the samples have been picked up. Holding it any longer can affect the quality of the food being served to the ticket holders. Most cook offs allow the wagons to start serving the public as soon as the samples are picked up.
- Some events hand out the food and supplies to each team after the meeting.

Food Judges

- Number suggested per food item – 3 / item
- Finding judges
 - Local food experts
 - Local politicians
 - Public
- Judging location
 - Tent
 - Tables

- Chairs
- Food Judging Score Sheets along with pen/pencil – ACWA can provide a sample for you to run copies to use.
- Drinking water, crackers and/or grapes to cleanse the palate
- Judges briefing
 - Not a gourmet competition
 - Summary of what the competition is
 - Using historically correct ingredients
 - Cooking over open fires and coals

Food Runners – Possibly use Boy Scouts, 4H, and local civic club members to pick up food samples and carry them to food judging area.

Tabulation Team – if possible get someone who works at a bank and is good at using a 10 key adding machine and/or computer for data entry from the judging sheets best to have three so they can check one another to ensure results are correct.

Meal Serving:

- Each wagon should receive paper goods and eating utensils.
- Will each person being served have a ticket? Or have the tickets been assigned to different wagons to keep a balance between the wagons? If so, suggest you provide a volunteer (use Boy Scouts, 4H, civic club members) at each wagon to take up tickets and ensure the ticket holder is eating at the correct wagon.
- Is there a plan for what wagon teams are to do with any extra food? Possibly have a plan for a local charity group to pick up and/or give to homeless groups.
- Recommend drinks be served at a separate location than at the wagon. Can provide a fundraising opportunity for a local group to sale drinks, i.e. Boy Scouts, etc.

Awards Presentation:

- Location for presentation
 - Should be covered in case of bad weather
 - Having checks prewritten except for winners names will cut down on wait time for the award presentations.
 - Have a list of who won what place so the announcer will be able to get everything correct! Double check the list! Now check it one more time! 😊