

ACWA Chuck Wagon Cook Off Food Judging Guidelines

01-26 Revision

The ACWA was created to interpret and preserve the heritage or life on the trail and the skills used to prepare food over an open fire. ACWA recommends the events use the following guidelines for food preparations along with food judging.

1. Use ACWA food judging sheets.
2. All cooking materials/tools must be consistent with those available during the trail drive era – 1866 to 1897. All food cooked by the wagon team must be cooked from scratch, at your wagon, the day of the cook off by the wagon team. Recommend for fairness among all teams that all food be cooked with the ingredients provided (except for spices and flavoring) and on the day of the event. Recommend the spices and other flavoring be period correct; however, the Event can determine what spices or flavoring can be allowed.
3. Food must be prepared over an open ground fire or pit. No stoves are allowed. Fire boxes may be allowed for safety or as dictated by the fire marshal.
4. The 5 dishes required are meat, beans, bread, potatoes and dessert. A 6th food may be prepared but not included in the overall results.
5. The Event will give the teams a specific time for food samples to be picked up or turned in. Note the pickup time should be very close to the public being served to maintain the safety of the food item(s). A mandatory meeting of the Food Judges shall be held 30 minutes prior to the food samples turn in time. This is where you will go over these tips and guidelines for Food Judging.
6. Recommend using a blind judging process of :
 - a) The Coordinator who assigns a letter and/or number to each chuck wagon team. This must be shared with the Tabulation Team.
 - b) The letter/number is written on each food container and handed out to the teams with other supplies.
 - c) The Coordinator should keep the chuck wagon teams' assigned identifier private from the judges.
 - d) Disqualify any container that has an identifiable brand or info other than the letter and/or number assigned.
 - e) Recommend having the food judging take place away from the wagons or the public. To maintain anonymity of the chuck wagon teams, recommend the Event have runners to pick up the food or have the chuck wagon teams to place their entries on a separate table away from the food judges.
 - f) Three food judges are needed per food item for a total of 15 food judges. Food Judges should not be allowed to be in the cooking area prior to food judging. No person should judge more than one food item. No person should judge the same food as the year before.
7. If sourdough bread is allowed, recommend asking the judges if they have ever tasted sourdough or do not like sourdough. If have never tasted or do not like sourdough, recommend assigning them to a different food category.

8. Recommend the Coordinator explain to the judges that food judging is subjective based on what you like or dislike; however, if you have a specific comment that will help the team in future events, please share this information in the *Comment* section of the score sheet. Allow all the judges to score each item for appearance before the tasting begins. Let the judges know that appearance will only be used to break a tie.
9. Ask the judges to refrain from talking about the food or doing anything that would indicate how much they like or dislike the food while you are judging.
10. It should be stated to the food judges the samples they are judging are from the ingredients furnished by the event except for spices and leavening agents. If in doubt, ask the Food Judging Coordinator. Do not count off if the item is cold. The time between pick up and judging is not the cooks' fault.
11. Score each item from 1-10 points trying to avoid any score less than a whole number. Recommend the Coordinator informs the judges not to give the initial samples too high a score as this creates a 'ceiling' for other samples that might be better. Explain that each judge's score will be combined with the other judges' scores to determine the winner and other places.
12. The event should provide adequate space removed from the wagons for the food judging. You will need tables, chairs, judging sheets, and pencils. To cleanse the palate of the judge between samples you will need flour tortilla, grapes, crackers, etc. as well as water. If judging beans, cleansing with unsalted crackers is best.
13. A monitor should be assigned to each food category. Their role is to retrieve the food sample and display it for each judge to score for appearance. Next, each food judge will sample to judge for taste. If any identifying marks are found, that sample is disqualified and given a zero. Monitors should also insure that no comments, facial expressions or gestures are made about the sample being judged. The food judges should be told that they are NOT trying to place the food in 1, 2, 3 order. They are to judge each sample on its own merits much like a diving judge in the Olympics giving a score between 0-10. If the judge thinks that two samples deserve a 9, that is what they should score them.
14. All food cooked by the wagon team must be cooked from scratch, at their wagon, the day of the cook off by the wagon team. Cooks may use only the basic ingredients provided for the preparation of their entries with the exception of spices and leavening agents commonly available during the trail drive era.
15. Food items not turned in by the designated turn-in time will not be scored.
16. Teams are not to turn in food items with any gravy.
17. It is recommended that the event coordinator or their designees circulate among the wagons during meal preparation to ensure that all rules are being observed.
18. As with any event, recommend you have a plan for any leftover food to be donated, i.e., first responders, security, or senior citizen center. Inform the teams of who and what time the leftovers will be picked up. Provide each team with the containers needed to store the leftovers for pick up.
19. **Tie breaking guidelines:** The tabulation team will place the individual scores on a master sheet. If it is determined that there is a tie, use the appearance score to break the tie. If there is still a tie, the head monitor will flip a coin to break the tie. This decision is final.