



American Chuck Wagon Association's Recommendations for a Successful Chuck Wagon Cook Off

The American Chuck Wagon Association (ACWA) wants your event to be successful. The sooner you can begin to plan, the better your event will run and the better 'word of mouth' your event will receive from participating chuck wagon teams! ACWA can provide tools, forms and expertise as well as point you to some 'subject matter experts' (SME) that have 'been there/done that.' In addition, ACWA has prepared this document to have you 'better informed' to decide on the type of event you wish to host as well as know what questions to ask a SME.

First, 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. You can only watch beans boil for so long.

ACWA would love to see the youth involved with your event, either by hosting an educational day for students from the local schools to tour the chuck wagons/camps and visit with the teams OR to host a Youth Cook Off – where the chuck wagons have a youth (preferably between 10 – 17 years of age) cook an item on the chuck wagon. Most chuck wagon teams are willing to host a youth at their chuck wagon; however, this information should be included in the event's invite so the teams can prepare. Youth will only cook one item, i.e., cobbler. This item can be judged as well as being served at the Cook's Meeting/Meal (described below) on the first night of the event.

ACWA can assist your Youth event by providing a small monetary stipend to defray food costs as well as lapel pins and bandanas for each participant and an ACWA embroidered apron for the winner. If you would like to apply, please send an email to acwa@chuckwagon.org and request a **Youth Cook Off Request**.

Planning:

- What is the purpose of the chuck wagon event? For example, raise money for charity or for profit? When talking to potential sponsors it is important to tell them exactly how their money is needed.
- Check with the local fire department concerning a burn ban and what they will require. For example:
 - 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 will it need to be done?
- Check with the local Health Department early.
 - Is an event food permit required, if so:
 - Cost of Permit
 - Are there any restrictions?

- 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 accept a food handler certificate from another State/County?
- Will they do an onsite inspection of the wagon camps and cooking/dishwashing setups?
 - If so, what day/time do the teams need to have their cooking/dishwashing set up?
- 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 per wagon to 50 or less. Also, plan for the possibility of one wagon having to drop out at the last minute due to an unforeseeable circumstance, thus increasing number on the remaining wagons.
- Once you have set a date, check the American Chuck Wagon Association's website: www.americanchuckwagons.com to see if there is another event scheduled for the same date. With new events popping up there could be the issue of two events on the same weekend or close to one another which would reduce the number of wagons as many may have already committed to another event.
- If not a conflict, send an email to acwa@chuckwagon.org for a **SAVE THE DATE**. **Note:** Your event does not have to be a paid member to have your event date/name listed on the website.
- 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 (\$400, \$300, \$200 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 dumpers, 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 teams and/or 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: For example, Vidalia, GA does an onion dish.

Site Recommendations

- 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 trailers will be large and some chuck wagon members will want to stay in them) and some owner and/or team members will have a 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.
- Overnight security for the wagon
- Plan for disposal of oil, gray water, and ashes (if necessary)
- Ample water supply for the wagons- if the wagons must run hoses to the water supply recommend event supply bottled cooking water as local water supply run through a hose can 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
- Firewood – the event must provide adequate firewood for cooking as well as 'conversational' wood to build a fire for the wagon judging.

Advertising

- Send out your chuck wagon invitation/registration at least three months in advance of your cook off.
- Establish an event Facebook page to place your advertisement and other essential information for individuals wanting to bring their chuck wagons OR just want to know how to purchase a meal ticket to your event.
- Advertise in the local paper along with placing flyers in the local businesses.

Awards

- Are you going to give monetary 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 overall.
- Will an overall award be given? (combining food and wagon scores)
- In addition to the monetary award, will there be other types of awards given to the overall winner (food and wagon together); wagon winner or overall food winner (sum of all food scores)
- 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? **Note:** doing both the wagon and food judging on the same day is not impossible; however, will put additional strain on the teams because they will try to maintain the authenticity of the camp for wagon judging but if having to cook for 50, it will require additional cast iron and supplies not used on the trail.

Event invitation

- If you join ACWA as an Event/Organization Member for \$100/year, ACWA will send out up to three pages of your event information/registration and event results to all ACWA members. In addition to the mail out, ACWA will post your information on their website, Facebook page as well as place it in the **ACWA Monthly Update** and ACWA quarterly newsletter, **Under the Fly**. If your event is benefiting Veterans, ACWA will do all the items of a paid member for FREE.
- If you become a member of ACWA, please try to have your 'info to be sent out' to ACWA about 3-4 months from the event's date.
- 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. **Note:** Some events require each chuck wagon team to submit a check for a deposit (traditionally \$100) to confirm 'show up'. If the chuck wagon team does not 'show up' then the event can decide on a case-by-case basis whether they will refund the team's deposit. When the team does 'show up' most events will tear up or return the check to the chuck wagon team.

Wagon Judging

- Number of wagon judges – recommend three, can use two.
- Experienced wagon judges 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.
- Allow
- If you want experienced wagon judges, you're going to have to provide reasonable compensation along with motel room for one night.

Wagon Judges

- Prior to the event, you might want to share with the judges the score sheet and/or ACWA recommendation document for review.
- On the day of the event, provide the judges with a briefing to contain any essential information they may need to know before beginning to judge, i.e., team size limits, restrictions on space (thus impacting the camp set up); cooking fire construction/restrictions, etc.
- Judges' tools – day of the event:
 - **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

Food and Supply Considerations

- Number of people the wagons are cooking for.
 - Public, judging items, judges, and team members must be included.
- Drinks – event can have bottled water provided to each wagon for each meal sold OR a local group, i.e., County 4H group or Future Farmers of America might want to sell water as a fundraiser.
- Plates, eating utensils, napkins.
- Containers for food judging samples
 - Event food – below is an example of quantity of food items to prepare 50 chicken fried steak 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 during the event
 - 10 gals bottled water for cooking.
 - 4 lbs. coffee
- Acquiring food items from vendors
 - Lead time to ensure delivery or pickup by volunteers.
 - Getting food donations
- Refrigeration onsite for the food that needs to be kept cold.
- Separating out the quantities of food for each wagon
- Ice for the wagons to keep food cold – chuck wagon teams will bring adequate ice coolers to house their cold items; however, the event must provide the ice.

Food Judging

- Recommend at least three judges per food item.
- Recommend 'blind judging' by
 - The leader of the food judging will assign a letter or number to each wagon.
 - The leader will write the assigned letter or number on each food container.
 - The food containers will be handed out at the time of the food items are given to each team.
 - The leader will keep a list of the chuck wagons and their assigned number private until after the food judging sheets have been turned in.
- Finding judges
 - Local food experts
 - Local politicians

- Public
- Judging location
 - Tent or somewhere away from the 'eyes' of the public and/or teams
 - Tables
 - Chairs
- Food Judging Tools
 - Food Judging Score Sheets – If needed, ACWA can provide a sample score sheet.
 - Pens, paper
 - Drinking water, crackers, and/or grapes to cleanse the palate
- Brief Judges
 - Summary of what type of competition it is.
 - Not a gourmet competition as teams should use historically correct ingredients.
 - Recommend judge on appearance first before judging tasting.
 - Bread – do not have someone judge if have never tasted sourdough or do not like it.
 - Cooking is done over open fires and coals.
 - If the food gets cold before judging, it is not the cooks' fault 😊

Food Runners

- Identify who will pick up the food samples and inform them of the pickup time.
- Recommend having an adult and providing a vehicle to expedite getting the samples to the judging area.

Tabulation Team – The number one problem calculating results are tabulation errors. It is recommended you form a team consisting of someone that is competent in adding, i.e., such as works at a bank, and we know it is 'old school' but using a 10-key adding machine (with a tape) and/or computer for data entry of judging results into a spreadsheet will increase the accuracy of the results. Chuck wagon teams will ask to see the event's score sheets, and nothing is more embarrassing than having a team recalculate the scores and find a different 'winner.' This can result in the event asking the 'winning team' to return money and/or other awards they received.

Cooks' Meeting: The event will host an evening meal for the chuck wagon teams and discuss the following:

- What time will food, supplies and food judging containers be delivered to each team? **Note:** Some events hand out food, ice, supplies, and containers to each team directly after the 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.

Meal Serving:

- Each wagon should receive paper goods and eating utensils for the number to be served.

- 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 bring containers to pick up and/or give them to senior citizens or first responders. **Note:** Food handling requirements should be enforced to ensure food is picked up with the timeframe recommended.
- 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.

Award 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! 😊