



Eat-Local Cooking Competition

A tasty way to connect farmers, chefs, and consumers.



This activity is a cooking competition—using local ingredients—between local restaurant chefs, community chefs, or students. The event brings farmers and chefs together, supports local producers, and educates consumers about ways to use local foods.



WHY?

Many **diners** want local food on restaurant menus, and many restaurants are open to meeting this demand, however sometimes they don't know the local farmers or what locally grown food is available.

Restaurants may want to publicize the fact that they serve local food. Farmers, in turn, would love to sell to restaurants, but may not know any chefs.

Schools and student chefs can meet local producers, explore preparation methods, and conduct local food education in a fun and exciting way.

Farmers and ranchers want to know how to plan, process, and distribute their product to supply the restaurant market or school district needs.

Community members might love going to the farmers market, but may not know how to prepare some of the food found there.



WHEN?

Competitions are usually held in late summer or early fall when there is a bounty of locally grown food available. Consider also holding a competition outside the typical harvest season in order to highlight season extension and cold storage options.



GOALS

- Link chefs and local producers.
- Let the public see firsthand how to use and prepare local food.
- Support and showcase local farms and ranches.
- Promote and encourage shopping at the local farmers market.

WHERE?

It can take place at almost any venue: at the local farmers market or community center, during a street party, or at a local food celebration—anywhere people gather in the summer or fall. The farmers market is an ideal location because it allows the chefs to walk among the crowd while shopping for their fresh, local ingredients. It also allows for the cooking competition and the judging to both be located on-site with a built-in audience of market shoppers.

WHO?

Partners: Community partners might include anyone with an interest in healthy local food, for example: garden groups, health service or physician groups, churches, farmers market coordinators, local farmers and ranchers, school food services, parent groups, elected officials, health departments, etc.

Chefs: Usually 2-3 chefs participate at each event. If you want to hold two separate events, the winner of each can then compete against each other in a final, third event to determine the “grand prize” winner. Chefs can be chosen based on their willingness to participate or a restaurant’s desire to feature local food. Chefs can also be chosen specifically to highlight a particular program, such as a school chef to highlight a Farm to School program, or a locally known barbecue expert to highlight local meat.

Judges: Choose a panel of three or five judges (always an odd number to prevent a tie). Judges may include: community or tribal leaders, teachers, a well-known local chef, or a market shopper chosen in a drawing.

HOW? IDEAS FROM THE IRON HORSE CHEF COMPETITION

The Iron Horse Chef Competition in La Plata County, Colorado, is structured as follows: chefs are given a list of equipment and ingredients they are allowed to bring and another list of equipment that will be supplied. The chefs are notified about the requirements of the dish in advance (for example: use a minimum of five local ingredients, including one local protein source). See samples of all these lists and event requirements online.

At the beginning of the event, they are given 15 minutes to shop for ingredients at the farmers market and one hour to cook. Chefs are judged on specific criteria while using all local ingredients. Each chef is presented with a prize (donated by local merchants), with the winner presented with a bigger prize. If several competitions are held, the grand prize can be a professional chef’s coat or apron with “Winner of the Eat-Local Cooking Competition” and the date printed on it.

Judging Criteria:



SAMPLE PLANNING TIMELINE FROM THE IRON HORSE CHEF COMPETITION

10 weeks before event

Establish planning committee (recruit new members if necessary).
Clarify roles, responsibilities, and tasks.
Decide on possible event date(s).
Identify potential chefs.
Budgeting & financing:
* Identify existing resources.
* Estimate probable costs.
* Create an itemized budget.
* Plan how to raise the necessary money.

9 weeks before event

Finalize event date(s).
Recruit/invite chefs to participate.
Recruit judges and announcer.
Start fundraising and prize donation process.
Reserve tents, chairs, tables (including for volunteers, judges, and chefs).
Reserve grills (raise money to buy grills or rent/borrow them for the day).

8 weeks before event

Finish selecting chefs, judges, and announcer.
Continue working on fundraising.
Develop poster design.
Event merchandise: T-shirt, water bottles?

7 weeks before event

Volunteer coordinator: recruit volunteers for event set up and clean up.
Select meats to be used at event and find where to purchase.

6 weeks before event

Finalize press release.
Print and distribute posters around the community.

5 weeks before event

Send press release out to local papers, TV, and radio stations.
Finish putting up posters.

4 weeks before event

Check in with location of competition to reserve spot for tents and chairs.
Hold a chefs meeting to go over rules.

2-3 weeks before event

Talk to the announcer and go over expectations.
Begin pulling together "Day Of" equipment and reserve anything if needed.
Obtain fuel for grills or butane burners.

1 week before event

Send reminder email to chefs, judges, and announcer.
Load up van/truck (plates, water coolers, PA system, etc.).
Assemble "Day Of" event box (paper towels, extra extension cord, dry erase boards, markers, duct tape, dish towels, extra paper).

DAY OF EVENT

Make sure you have all supplies & equipment.
Volunteer coordinator: kitchen station set up/break down, write down what chefs are buying and take photos.

1-2 WEEKS AFTER EVENT

Send thank you cards to all sponsors, donors, volunteers, chefs, judges, and announcers.

Ensure all invoices are paid promptly.

Have chef jacket or apron embroidered or printed for winning chef.

Finalize/reconcile event budget.

Schedule and hold a debriefing meeting with event planning committee.

Compile suggestions for next year's event.

**Congratulations
on holding a
successful local
food event!**

MIXING IT UP: OTHER COMPETITION IDEAS...

The Farm to School connection:

School cafeteria chefs with student judges!

Student competitions.

Amateur chefs & community members:

Amateur chefs BBQing local meats.

Government officials, business owners, local celebrities, etc. competing using local ingredients for a fundraising event.

Youth or family/all-ages teams.

Local food cook-offs:

Competitions during seasonal or harvest celebrations.

Producer-chefs:

Local farmers take an opportunity to educate consumers on how to use their produce while showing off their cooking skills!



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find online resources for this tool, as well as additional tool booklets on other community food topics, under "Food System Tools" at www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org or www.HCFS.org



Funded by The Christensen Fund

JENNIFER WRENN, DEC 2010