

County Agent News
Dan Folske
May 2, 2016

Food Exhibits at the County Fair

The 100th Burke County Fair is fast approaching. After slowly dwindling in size along with the population of the county, the Fair has been growing in recent years thanks to many volunteers. This year's events include a Trail Ride, Bull Riding, a 4-H Horse Show, a Ranch Rodeo and several types of auto racing including IMCA Modifieds, Street Stocks, Hobby Stocks, and Enduros.



Along with the events and activities are the exhibits, both 4-H and open class, in the main fair building. The NDSU Extension Service has just released new guidelines for 4-H Food Exhibits at fairs and achievement days. While targeted at 4-H exhibits it is appropriate for open class exhibits as well. If you are considering bringing a food exhibit to the fair here are some considerations.

Appropriate Food Exhibits for North Dakota 4-H Fairs

Food and nutrition projects for 4-H exhibits should be prepared with food safety in mind. The importance of food safety cannot be overemphasized. Judges will not evaluate foods they consider unsafe, and you do not want the judges to become ill.

Why are some foods inappropriate for display at fairs?

Most foods are safe to consume immediately after preparation; others pose unique handling considerations that might be difficult to provide in an exhibit. For example, custards, cream pies, fluid dairy products, egg dishes and meat products require colder storage temperatures than are usually available away from home. Other foods may be unsafe if kept at room temperature for more than two hours.

Is a food exhibit appropriate? Ask yourself:

1. Does this product require refrigeration? If so, it should not be exhibited.
2. Will this product retain its quality and appearance when evaluated by judges against a standard or when viewed by the public? If not, it should not be exhibited.

Acceptable for Fair Display

All foods must be made from scratch and not from commercial mixes; however, a cake mix can be used as a single ingredient in a recipe with several ingredients.

Questions have been raised about these products but they are OK:

- Caramel rolls
- Cream cheese mints
- Pineapple upside down cake
- Canned products
 - Must have been preserved in the last 12 months.
 - Must be put in a standard canning jar, such as quart, pint or jelly jar. If canning jars smaller than a pint are used, processing should be done according to pint processing guidelines. A jar ring should remain on the jar.

- Canned and pickled products, including salsa, vegetables and meats, must meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines for recipe and heat processing.
- Fruits, jams, jellies and other spreads must use an approved source.
- Must be labeled with the following information: name of the product, date it was canned, canning method used, processing time, altitude, recipe and source of recipe.

- Labels for vegetables, fruits, meats, pickles and mixes also should include the type of pack and pounds of pressure used.

- Pecan/walnut pies OK if: These pies are safe if made from a traditional recipe using eggs, sugars and no added water or milk. Although these are very rich and moist, they are safe because they do not have enough moisture to support bacterial growth. Products made from a nontraditional recipe that includes added water or milk are not acceptable.

- Jerky must be stored in an airtight container and be freshly made using a research-tested recipe from an approved source from the USDA. This recipe should have been made within two weeks of exhibiting.

Not Acceptable for Fair Display

- Any food requiring refrigeration
- Any food containing alcohol
- Breads containing ingredients that normally are refrigerated (such as chopped and dehydrated vegetables, meats and layers of cheese). A small amount of thinly sliced vegetables may be used as a garnish on top if added before baking.
- Breads, brownies or cakes baked in a jar or nonfood-grade container, including anything baked in a jar and allowed to vacuum seal
- Caramel corn or pies baked in a paper grocery bag. Bags are inappropriate cooking containers because the bag may not be sanitary, the glue and ink used on the bag have not been approved for contact with food and may give off toxic fumes when heated, the bag may catch fire, and grocery bags made of recycled paper may contain a variety of contaminants that could leach into the food.
- Custard and cream-filled pies, cheesecakes
- Flavored oils - Oils infused with herbs or garlic are a potential botulism risk. Products made with these oils also are considered unsafe.
- Fresh salsa
- Frosting, icing, glazes on any cake or bars
- Homemade egg noodles
- Raw egg in any uncooked product
- Sourdough, friendship bread, etc. Although bakery products leavened by wild microorganisms have been used for years, the potential for abuse may result in an unsafe product. Of particular concern are toxins produced by a variety of organisms, including *Staphylococcus*.
- Sweet rolls with cottage cheese/egg topping – These toppings imply a sugar, egg, cream cheese (or other unripened cheese such as cottage or ricotta cheese) mixture that is protein-rich and moist, and can be contaminated easily. Bacteria love high protein, high moisture and a neutral pH environment.
- Vegetables marinated in oils and herbs - The vegetables could harbor botulism spores. Covering moist vegetables with oil results in anaerobic conditions that may allow botulinum growth.

For specific questions, contact your local NDSU Extension office.

Adapted with permission from Beattie, S., Meimann, E., Bogue, S., and Nelson, D.

“Inappropriate Food Exhibits for Iowa 4-H Fairs” (2009). Iowa State University. 4-H Youth Development Publications. Book 10.

4-H Healthy Lifestyle Committee: Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., Macine Lukach and Callie Johnson