

2025 Humboldt County Fair Chili Cook-Off with Guy Fieri

Thursday August 21, 2025 · Humboldt County Fair Grandstands

Hosted by: Humboldt County Fair Association & Guy Fieri

Event Description and Awards

The Humboldt County Fair Chili Cook Off is a competition allowing both individuals and businesses to participate competitively as teams in a homestyle chili cooking competition. All contestants must follow the below listed directions or may be disqualified without refund of entry fees. Awards for competitors will be announced by Guy Fieri after judging is completed.

Homestyle Chili Definition: Homestyle Chili is any kind of meat, or combination of meats, and/or vegetables cooked with beans, chili peppers, various spices and other ingredients. Homestyle chili may be any color. Non-meat substitutes are welcome but seafood is not allowed for this competition.

Awards are as follows:

- **Grand Champion:** \$1,000 Cash & Prizes
- **Reserve Champion:** \$500 Cash & Prizes
- **People's Choice Champion:** \$350 Cash & Prizes – Win by majority with this democratic flavor
- **Golden Buzzer Award:** Camp Chef Grill and Guy signed Chef Knife – Bring your friends and have them buy Golden Buzzer Tickets for this special award where popularity is the determining factor, not flavor! All friends and family connections are encouraged to vote – who cares if it's too bland or doesn't have enough salt? With enough friends you can still win big!
- *Additional Awards are:*
 - **Craziest Crew:** Show off your most outrageous outfits, over-the-top personalities, and unforgettable team spirit. The wackier, the better for this award - this is your time to stand out!
 - **Flaming Chili:** Crank up the spice and serve up a chili that delivers a fiery kick and unforgettable taste. This award is all about flavor that sizzles and leaves a lingering kick to the tastebuds!
 - **Spiciest Booth:** Deck out your booth with bold décor, creative flair, and over-the-top style. Whether it's fiery colors, dazzling lights, or standout themes, go all out—because in this competition, anything goes!

Eligibility & Registration

- All cooks must be 18 and older *or* cooks under 18 must have a parent also participating on the same team who will sign a waiver on their behalf. Cooks must be twelve years of age or older.
- All teams must register online at <https://www.humboldtcountyfair.org/fair-info/chili-cook-off> and pay the competition fee of \$250.
 - Any team who does not pay the fee by end of day July 31st 2025 may be dismissed from the competition. If space is available after this time, the Humboldt County Fair Association may chose to allow more entrants or enforce the close date at their discretion in the interest of having an enjoyable event for the public.
- All competing teams are required to participate in both the Grand Championship and the People's Choice Competition.
 - Marketing and business swag is welcome for the People's Choice samples only.
- Competitors are prohibited from wearing clothing/costumes and/or behaving in any manner that is offensive or inappropriate to any person or group. Political references are prohibited unless strictly satirical in nature – whether or not anything political is in appropriate is at the sole discretion of the Humboldt County Fair Association.
 - This is a family event and failure to comply with this rule will be grounds for dismissal from the competition with no opportunity to receive a refund for entry fees or collect awards that

may have already been determined before the décor, costume, and/or incident is reported to staff.

Cooking Equipment & Set Up

- Humboldt County Fair (HCF) will provide a 10x10 ft area for each contestant to cook -10x10 space. This space will be determined by staff and teams will be directed to their location.
- Each contestant is responsible for supplying all their own cooking equipment, ingredients, supplies, and utensils, as well as 3 oz sample cups and spoons for the public as part of the People's Choice Competition.
- HCF will require safety preparedness by all contestants. All competition teams will be required to have a fire extinguisher within reasonable distance of their booth as well as sanitation and healthy food practices in effect for the entire competition.

Food Preparation Time

- Only prepping is allowed during this portion of the competition – NO COOKING of chili may occur.
- Meat may be pre-cut or ground, but MAY NOT be pre-cooked, treated, seasoned, or marinated in any manner. Preference is not given to either cut meat, ground meat, shredded meat, or cubed meat.
- Beans are NOT required for the chili recipes.
- No ingredient may be prepped in any way prior to the commencement of the official cooking time.
 - The only exceptions are:
 - Dried beans that require overnight soaking, meat substitutes; and
 - Canned or boxed products such as canned beans, vegetables, sauces, pepper sauces, liquids, and seasoning pastes.
 - Grinding and/or mixing of spices is allowed prior to the event. All other ingredients must be prepared and/or chopped on-site during the preparation period.
- The preparation period begins when announced after booth set-up and decoration is completed.
- All food - whether stored, resting, or cooking - must always be maintained at food-safe temperatures.
- **All food handling, preparation, and serving must comply with all local and state guidelines, policies, and rules.**
 - All raw food must be kept below 40 degrees at all times until cooking said ingredient commences.
 - All cooked food must be kept above 140 degrees at all times until serving and judgement is completed.
 - Humboldt County Fair Association reserves the right to inspect all meat/ingredients and check temperatures at any time, by HCFA staff or local state officials.
- Failure to abide by any of the above, as determined at the sole discretion of the Chief Judge and/or the Humboldt County Fair Association, will result in immediate disqualification from the cook-off.

Time to Cook

- A representative of the cook-off will conduct a contestant meeting no later than 1 hour prior to the start of the cooking segment of the competition. At this meeting, instructions will be given and questions answered.
- The typical cooking period is 3 to 4 hours. The exact starting and ending of each cooking period will be announced by the Humboldt County Fair. Cooking during the entire cooking period is at the sole discretion of the contestant.

JUDGING BY CATEGORY

People's Choice Competition

- Event attendees will taste chili prepared by the competing cooks – this chili is known as People's Choice chili. Each ticket will be considered one vote when collected by the contestant. The chili that receives the highest number of votes by the public will win.
 - The winner of the People's Choice is truly by the votes only – you can still win the People's Choice Competition even if you have placed first or second in the Grand Championship.
 - In the case of a tie, a chosen staff member of the Humboldt County Fair Association will be the tiebreaker who is otherwise unaffiliated with the chili cook-off.
 - The judgement of the tiebreaker is final and cannot be challenged or overruled.
- All competing teams are required to participate in the People's Choice Competition as well with the same chili recipe that is submitted for Grand Championship.
- All teams are required to provide chili to the public to participate in the Humboldt County Fair Chili Cook Off competition.
 - We anticipate about 500 members of the public attending the Chili Cook Off, we recommend you prepare no less than 12 gallons of chili. (3 oz x 500 = 1500 oz. 1500 oz / 1 gallon is 11.72 gallons. The Grand Champion judging will require 32 ounces as well.)
 - Samples must be in a 3 oz cup with a spoon that are both provided by the competing team.
 - Marketing and swag is welcome for the People's Choice Competition, be it on the cups or at your booth, get your name out there so they know who you are!
- Attendees are not required to purchase tickets to participate and taste chili but voting attendees will be required to purchase a \$10 ticket that includes a free mug and ten tickets to vote for their favorite.
 - You are welcome to share on your social media that you are participating and to attend. You may also note that they should buy a ticket to be able to vote.
 - Tickets are available online at www.humboldtcountyfair.org.
 - You may not in any circumstance pay, reward, or gift people to receive their votes for your chili. You may be disqualified if your team is found suspect of bribery or attempted bribery.
- Contestants must cook and provide their own entries to the public.
- A portion of all People Choice Participant tickets sold will support the Client Benefit Fund which directly supports the individuals that are served by the Redwood Coast Regional Center. To learn more about this, please go to the Redwood Coast Regional Center website.

Grand Champion and Reserve Champion Competition

- Each cook will be assigned a contestant number and given a cup and/or bowl for each judge prior to the start of the cooking period.
 - Each bowl will have the contestant's assigned number marked on the bottom so the score keeper may keep track of how many points each team is accrued.
 - These cups/bowls MUST be kept separate from your own stock of sample cups for the public.
- It is the contestant's responsibility to verify that the number on the bottom of their bowl is the same as their assigned contestant number.
- Each cook is responsible for delivering their cup to the judging area at the end.
- Each cup must be filled to the bottom of the rim.
- Cook-off judges will choose their top three, using the judging criteria set forth.
- Place levels and prizes are determined by the Humboldt County Fair Association and will be determined by the results of the votes provided by the judges and scorekeeper.

BLIND JUDGING

1. Judging will take place in the bar area under the grandstands. Access to the area will be restricted.
2. Judges will take a sample from each team and note any comments on their official ballots.
3. Judges must use a clean spoon for each taste and will clear their palates after each taste using the condiments supplied on the judging table, such as water, flour tortillas, sour cream, etc.
4. Judges must not make any comments or gestures about any of the chilis that may influence the decision of another Judge.
5. Each judge must write their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winning chili choices within the designated spaces on their ballot before giving it to the Scorekeeper. It is requested that all Judges sign their ballots. The 1st place choice will be designated 3 points, 2nd will receive two points, and 3rd will receive one.
 - Highest score between all judges will receive Grand Champion.
 - Second Highest Score will receive Reserve Champion
 - Third highest score will be held in reserve in case highest or second highest placing teams are disqualified for any reason.
6. Judges should stay in the general judging area but must stay away from Scorekeeper and judging tables until the Chief Judge and the Scorekeeper have declared that there is a verified winner.
7. In the event of a tie score for any of the three top places, the Chief Judge shall appoint an odd number of judges above two as “tie-breakers.” Each of the tie-breaker judges must re-taste only the bowls involved in the tie and give their decisions to the Scorekeeper.
 - The bowl receiving the most points from the tie-breaking judges will be declared the winner of the tie and the other bowl (or bowls) should be moved down one place. Ties are broken only for Grand Champion, Reserve Champion, and Third Place.
8. Judges must understand that they are determining the winners of the competition and must be respectful of the judging process and system.
9. Judges must follow all directions and instructions from the Chief Judge. The Chief Judge may unilaterally dismiss a Judge or disqualify a Judge’s ballot for actions deemed detrimental to the judging.
10. When judging, the chili you select to win that category should be the one you individually like best, with no other influence affecting your decision. Select 2nd and 3rd place the same way.
 - Chili that looks appealing with a pleasing aroma and that tastes good – and that meets the requirements of each category’s rules – is typically scored well.
 - Meat/meat substitute should be tender; not too mushy or too firm. Meat/meat substitute should have a distinct chili flavor.
 - No preference is given to cut (diced) meat, ground meat, shredded meat, or cubed meat.
 - The sauce should not be too thin or too thick. There should be a balanced ratio of sauce to meat.
 - The sauce should have a distinct chili flavor.
 - The heat from spices should not be bland and not too hot.
 - Bowls of chili to be judged may not include any garnish or topping to distinguish it from the other bowls at first appearance.
 - No additional ingredient that is added to the bowl, that is not found throughout the entire bowl, is allowed.

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DAY OFF – PARTICIPANT SCHEDULE

Humboldt County Fair – 129th Annual Celebration

We're so excited to have you join us for a day full of flavor, fun, and friendly competition! Below is the schedule for participants. Please review carefully and don't hesitate to reach out with any questions. Let's make it a great one!

7:00AM – 9:00 AM

Load-In & Set-Up

Early arrival is highly recommended to give yourself plenty of time to get settled and set up your space. Especially important if you're participating in Spiciest Booth!

9:00 AM

Cook's Meeting

We'll go over rules, judging procedures, and answer any questions. Attendance is important, so don't miss it!

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Prep Time

Use this time to get your ingredients prepped and your station organized. (See "Food Preparation Time" for details.)

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Cooking Time

Let the competition begin! Refer to the "Time to Cook" and "Judging by Category" sections for guidance.

1:00 PM Fair Gates Open!

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Official Judging

Our event team will guide the judging process to ensure everything runs smoothly and fairly. Instructions will be covered during the morning meeting.

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Public Judging

This is your chance to shine in the People's Choice and Golden Buzzer Awards! Bring the energy, offer up those samples, and enjoy connecting with fairgoers. (See the "Judging by Category" section for specifics.)

4:00 PM

Awards Ceremony

Join us at the stage as Guy Fieri announces the winners! It's a celebration of everyone's hard work — don't miss it!

5:00 PM

Wrap-Up & Load-Out

You may begin packing up at 5:00 PM, unless the awards ceremony is still in progress. Wait until it concludes before breaking down your space.

Thank you for being such a vital part of the Humboldt County Fair — it's your passion and creativity that bring this event to life. Best of luck, and we can't wait to see (and taste!) what you bring to the table.