

Building Family Through Food and Fellowship

States find a bonding experience through cooking together at the Junior National Hereford Expo.

by **Bridget Beran**

The Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) has been described as the ultimate family vacation by the hundreds of junior members and their families who attend every year. For many families, feeding their kids fair food or running to a fast-food restaurant multiple times a day just isn't going to work. As a result, several states began combining their efforts and providing meals for their juniors.

More than meals

For the Kansas group, dividing up the meals between the families was the ideal choice.

"Several years back, we were all making our own meals and we decided we should just help each other out," says Amanda Davis, Kansas Junior Hereford Association advisor.



Several families in Texas help get all of their hungry kids fed. Mexican food is a Texas staple.

"At our state show, we usually have a sign-up sheet."

However, there are several different ways to get everyone fed. In Illinois the Illinois Hereford Association and the Illinois Hereford Women (IHW) donate funds to support their juniors.

"We're a very large state. We have a big group and a big following,

not only with the kids, but parents, grandparents and we're lucky enough to have a state association that supports our kids," says Lisa Babbs, Illinois Junior Hereford Association advisor. "The men's association provides two meals a week every year for the JNHE and the IHW provides one meal and we try to pick the days by what's not provided through the meal tickets."

The bigger the state, the more coordination is needed to get the large amount of kids fed. For Texas the Texas Hereford Auxiliary and the Texas Poll-ettes came together to plan meals and feed all of the juniors from both the Texas Junior Hereford Association and the Texas Junior Polled Hereford Association. In 2004 the leadership in the Texas Hereford Auxiliary and the Texas Poll-ettes decided that it was time that they should eat as a state.

"We organized it at the state show. We always had a fantastic hospitality table at our state show and we thought we needed to carry this through and eat as a state at JNHE. Especially because the barn in Tunica was removed from the city," Alise Nolan explains. "Texas Hereford Auxiliary and Texas Poll-ettes each gave money



The Nolan family hosted families from Texas, along with the National Hereford Women board of directors, for a fish fry during JNHE.

toward meals and each family gave \$25 to \$50 a piece.”

These days every family donates \$50 or \$100 if they have a bigger crew, and the money is pooled. Families who have volunteered to cook turn in grocery lists, and Alise compiles them into a comprehensive list. A few families make the trip to the grocery store in the first day or two of the JNHE and pick up everything from breakfast food to watermelons.

“I ran back on the second to last day and bought 15 watermelons,” Alise says. “It’s a tradition in Texas that we always have watermelon on the last two days.”

For Alise, southern hospitality is second nature. As president of the National Hereford Women (NHW), she hosted the NHW board, along with countless families from Texas and others who were in their campground for a fish fry during the JNHE. And she says the effect cooking and eating together has had on their state is incredible.

“It’s really built camaraderie in our state. We all come together and it’s been a group effort,” Alise says. “I can’t say enough about what it’s done for our group and the unity for us to cook together and eat together. Where can you go eat for the week, that many meals, for \$50?”

Reducing costs was a big factor for Illinois and helping their families in any way was very important.

“I think it’s great because it’s an expensive trip and it brings the group together,” Lisa says. “We’re a close-knit group and we just help each other. In addition to that, we have a state table and we provide coffee and lemonade every day and volunteers provide snacks every day. It can be hard to get out and go get something to eat so if we can provide it for them, that’s what we try to do.”



Whether it’s back at the RVs or at the stalls, eating as a state binds states together.

Decreasing the already hectic schedule of the JNHE was also a key reason for Kansas families cooking together.

“It takes a lot of stress off if you can have the meals provided by the state because you’re usually just in charge of one instead of every meal of every day,” Amanda says. “It gets everybody involved and we get more time to spend with each other.”

Barn favorites

But what can you make in a barn that can feed upwards of 100 people? Amanda, Lisa and Alise offer their suggestions for quick barn meals that can be done in one pot.

“We’ve found that pulled pork or brisket are good,” Amanda says. “You can also pre-cook taco meat at home and you can do lots of things with taco meat once you get here.”

In Illinois the IHW provided a breakfast with granola bars, yogurt and fruit for an easy come-and-go meal. Simplicity is also a key factor Lisa says.

“We had mostaccioli one day which was easy because we just had to have one pan and then some garlic bread,” Lisa says. “One thing we did that was really easy was hamburgers and hot dogs and then we did cheesy potatoes and baked beans. Something that you can throw in a roaster or crockpot that’s easy.”

Recipes have been tested over a series of years in Texas to figure out what works best for their kids and working around the confinements of cooking in a barn or a camper.

“It was kind of funny the first year because everything was chicken, chicken and more chicken because it was easy to cook in the roaster,” Alise says. “We would have King Ranch Chicken Enchiladas, which is my specialty, or chicken spaghetti. Sloppy joes I think was our only beef meal.”

However, they wised up and added some beef, serving tacos at the Hereford State Tailgate and making fajitas. Alise credits Monte Williams and Jeff Chaffin for taking the lead in cooking this year. She also suggests chip beef barbecue, which can be bought at Sam’s Club and warmed up, Frito pie, jambalaya, and pork roast and sweet potatoes. She also advises spraying your roaster or crockpot down with cooking spray to avoid a messy or difficult cleanup.

“If you have a main dish, a side, maybe a salad and a roll, you’ve got a great meal,” Alise says. “I encourage other states to cook with your groups. If you’re new to your state, it helps you get to know others from your state. It’s a fun time together as a group. I can’t tell you how much it made us come together as state.” **HW**