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How much equipment do I need to cook in a contest?

Spending any time walking around today's contest site taking a look at the assortment of setups could make a person contemplating getting involved with this sport somewhat intimidated. There is everything from 40' motor coaches pulling high dollar cooking rigs to teams cooking on several different styles and brands of cookers that are loaded into the back of a minivan.

You'll see cookers, canopies, tables, chairs, coolers, cambros, water jugs, fire-rings, tents, string lights, banners and just about anything else in between. A candid interview with many teams on the circuit will almost always reveal they are lugging around more stuff than they need to, but off hand, can't tell you what they would elect to leave at home. Which makes a newbie wonder, what do I NEED to get involved?

The condensed answer is, "what ever you need to get the job done." If you decide to cook all four categories, you will need enough cooker space to prepare your entire load of contest meats, whatever volume you elect to cook. The amount of meat you are cooking pretty much dictates the equipment you will need. Cooking one brisket, one butt, a couple of slabs of ribs and at least 8 pieces of chicken would just about be the minimum needed.

I have seen teams cook a complete contest on two Weber kettles, the kind you can buy at yard sales all day for \$10-20. Look around, between you and your potential teammates, you probably have enough cookers and other equipment to get started with. Splitting the cooking assignments for the various entries to your first contest will allow your friends to practice their meats at home on the cookers they are planning to use and vice versa.

Again, look to friends and neighbors for needed tables, chairs and maybe a canopy to keep the sun and weather off. For your first contest, you might think about borrowing a few things just to get buy, this will cut down on the overall start-up expense. Don't think you have got to go out and buy an entire setup just to get started. Again, you only need what it takes to get the job done.

The best piece of advice I can give anyone planning on cooking their first contest would be to organize a practice cook or test run. Pick a convenient date, notify the folks on the team, purchase your supplies, assemble your site at home, prep and cook your meats just like at the contest you are planning to cook. Keep a notepad handy to record what you use to complete the various tasks. With a little review and editing, this can then become your contest checklist.

Do you need to feel that those around you will look down their noses at you for throwing up what appears to be a rag-tag set-up? Absolutely not. Everyone has to start somewhere, I guarantee that most teams will look at you and think, been there, done that. I'll also make you a small wager, after you arrive at your first contest and you introduce yourself to the neighboring teams around you will find many folks that will be more than willing

to offer you tips, advice and encouragement. If you get there and find you have forgotten something or have a question about a procedure, don't be afraid to ask your new friends and neighbors, my guess is they'll be more than happy to help. All you have to do is ask!