

2026 TAILGATE COOKOFF RULES

2nd Annual Poppa Earle's Tailgate Festival | November 20–21, 2026

COOKOFF OVERVIEW

Each team must prepare two dishes on Saturday:

1. Chicken & Sausage Gumbo — Blind judged by the official judges panel.
2. Best Tailgate Dish — Tasted and voted on by festival attendees.

To qualify for Best Tailgate of the South Champion, teams must compete in both categories.

Over \$5,000 in trophies and prizes. Prizes are awarded to the top 3 finishers in each category.

SETUP & SCHEDULE

- **Friday, Nov. 20:** Team setup after 12:00 PM. Kickoff Party begins at 4:00 PM with Thomas Cain, cochon de lait, and fireworks on the levee.
- **Saturday, Nov. 21:** Tailgate Cookoff and LSU vs. Tennessee Game Day. Festival opens at 11:00 AM.

TEAM SPACE

- Each entry includes one 10' x 10' cooking space.
- Tents must be 10' x 10' or smaller.
- Two spaces may be purchased for \$225 for a 10' x 20' area. This must be arranged in advance.
- Teams must bring their own tent, tables, chairs, grills, fuel, utensils, water, electricity, and cooking supplies.
- All cooking and equipment must stay within the team's designated area.

GENERAL RULES

- Prepare and serve all food safely and sanitarilly.
- Tents and décor must be family-friendly.
- Keep your area clean. Trash cans and dumpsters will be provided.
- Cookoff teams may NOT sell food. Only approved vendors may sell.
- **Water and electricity are NOT provided.**
- Quiet generators are allowed but must not disturb teams or guests.
- Teams must clean their area before leaving.

GOOD LUCK! Bring your best food, have fun, and help us support the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

CHICKEN & SAUSAGE GUMBO COOKOFF GUIDELINES

This is a traditional Chicken & Sausage Gumbo competition. Seafood, duck, and other non-traditional proteins are not allowed. Creativity is not part of the judging criteria, and points may be deducted for ingredients outside the traditional category.

Judging is blind. Cooking may begin at 5:00 AM or later. Each team will receive an assigned turn-in time. Teams may begin serving gumbo to the public when the gates open at 11:00 AM if you choose. You do not have to serve Gumbo to the public if you do not choose

COOKING & TURN-IN RULES

- Prepare at least 1 gallon of Chicken & Sausage Gumbo.
- Cooking may begin at 5:00 AM or later. Each team will receive at least 5 hours of cooking time.
- Judging begins at 10:30 AM in assigned groups. Turn-in times will be provided before the competition.
- Teams provide all your own ingredients and cooking supplies.
- Official judging containers will be provided. Teams must provide their own containers for serving the public.
- **Roux must be made from scratch on-site.** Premixed, jarred, or commercially prepared roux is not allowed.
- Chicken, sausage, and vegetables must **be uncooked** at the start and cooked on-site. Ingredients may be pre-chopped.
- Stock may be prepared in advance. Store-bought stock is allowed.
- Rice or other fillers may not be placed in judging containers. They may be served to the public.
- All ingredients are subject to inspection. Rule violations may result in disqualification.

JUDGING & TIEBREAKERS

Gumbo will be scored in the following order:

1. Taste
2. Color / Appearance
3. Consistency / Thickness
4. Seasoning / Spice
5. Aroma

If there is a tie, Taste is the first tiebreaker. If still tied, judges will move through the remaining categories in the order listed above until the tie is broken.

Official score sheet will be provided.



GUMBO COOKOFF SCORE SHEET	
Team number _____	
Each Category will be scored from 1-10 with 10 being the highest	
1. _____ Taste	Well-balanced, with no single ingredient overpowering the others. Full flavor
2. _____ Color/Appearance	A deep, rich dark caramel color is ideal. 8 9 10 9 8
3. _____ Consistency/Thickness	Should be velvety smooth. Not too thick or watery.
4. _____ Seasoning/Spice	Right amount of sodium. A good spice but not overly hot.
5. _____ Aroma	Must smell appetizing, flavorful and inviting.

BEST TAILGATE DISH GUIDELINES

The Best Tailgate Dish is judged entirely by the public. There are no restrictions on what teams may cook. Your gumbo dish will not count as your tailgate dish. Must make a separate dish to qualify to enter this category.

COOKING & SERVING

- Teams provide all ingredients, utensils, cooking equipment, and serving containers.
- Pre-cooking and advance preparation are allowed. There is no required cooking start time.
- Serving runs from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- Serve small tasting portions so guests can sample multiple dishes.
- Prepare at least 200 tasting portions.

PUBLIC VOTING

- Guests with a \$25 Food Pass receive a yellow wristband and two voting tickets.
- Only guests wearing a yellow wristband should be served. These guests have the voting tickets. Direct anyone without a wristband to the Poppa Earle's tent to purchase a Food Pass.
- Guests may give both tickets to one team or split them between two teams.
- Each team will receive an official bowl for collecting voting tickets.
- Voting closes at 4:30 PM. Bowls will then be collected and votes counted.
- The team with the most voting tickets wins.
- If there is a tie, the team's Gumbo Cookoff finish determines the winner.

A portion of Food Pass proceeds benefits the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

BEST TAILGATE OF THE SOUTH CHAMPION

The overall champion is determined by combining each team's finishing place in the Gumbo Cookoff and Best Tailgate Dish competition (*you must compete in both categories to win the overall*).

- We will add your two finishing positions in both categories together.
- The lowest combined score wins.
- Example: 1st Place Gumbo + 4th Place Tailgate Dish = 5 points.
- If there is a tie, the team's Gumbo Cookoff finish is the tiebreaker.

The Best Tailgate of the South Champion will be announced during the awards ceremony.