

ALCOHOL POLICIES

Fair facilities are used during the county fair and other special events, such as family reunions, rallies and weddings, throughout the year. For many of these, event organizers want to serve alcohol. Consumption of alcohol on the fairgrounds, however, poses a number of potential risks. Before an issue arises, it is best for the agricultural society (or fairgrounds owner) to develop a policy regarding alcohol use on the premises and to enforce the policy consistently.



ALCOHOL POLICIES





Alcohol policies in fair facilities vary greatly. Some ban alcohol outright. Others allow only beer and wine. Some policies require outside parties to obtain special permits from the agricultural society. Others limit the areas where alcohol can be consumed. Still others impose limits only on large groups, requiring proof of liquor liability insurance, licensed bartenders and a liquor license if alcohol is to be served.

Developing an alcohol policy is a local political decision. No matter what the decision is, it will upset some people; therefore, the policy needs to be thoroughly evaluated and approved by the fair board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MCIT suggests the following minimum recommendations:

- The policy decision should be made by the board, in consultation with legal counsel.
- The policy should comply with all federal, state and local laws.
- Post the alcohol policy throughout the fairgrounds in highly visible locations.
- Enforce the alcohol policy consistently.
- Address the policy in all appropriate written agreements.

CONSIDERATIONS

To help develop the best policy for a specific fair facility, the board should consider the kinds of interactions that occur on the fairgrounds and the types of events that take place there.

The agricultural society should examine as many possible scenarios as possible when developing an alcohol policy and ask the following questions:

- What is the local public opinion regarding alcohol use on the fairgrounds?
- What activities occur on the fairgrounds that might create more of a demand for alcohol use?
- Keep in mind this question especially regarding large groups: Who is responsible for cutting off someone who has had too much to drink?
- Are there high-hazard areas where it might be prudent to limit or ban alcohol consumption?
- What resources would it take to ban alcohol entirely from the fairgrounds and to enforce the ban?

- What resources would it take to ban alcohol partially and to enforce that policy?
- Would more law enforcement personnel be needed if alcohol were allowed?
- What resources would it take to patrol and regulate fairgrounds activities if there were no limitations on alcohol?
- Should the agricultural society require use of a caterer or licensed bartender?
- Should the agricultural society require insurance coverage of event hosts, especially if alcohol will be served?
- Should the agricultural society require a liquor license of fairgrounds users when they serve alcohol?
- How will the agricultural society post the policy and where?

BEER GARDENS

Beer gardens are a common sight at county fairs. They may restrict consumption to the beer garden only, or they may permit consumption throughout the grounds.



Alcohol served by beer gardens runs the gamut from 3.2 beer to mixed alcoholic drinks.

When consumption is only in the beer garden, consider designing for restricted entrance(s) and exit(s) with staffing for control. Plan for quick, orderly emergency evacuation, as well. Separate identification checks from the serving line, and utilize hard-to-counterfeit indicators, such as wristbands for those age 21 and over.

MCIT excludes coverage for organizations that are in the business of manufacturing, distributing, selling, serving or furnishing alcoholic beverages. When the agricultural society is selling directly to the public, it must arrange for coverage outside of MCIT. The organization also needs to obtain appropriate licensing. Avoiding serving to minors and overserving customers should be key parts of the operational plan.



When a decision is made not to serve a potential customer, the rationale for refusing service should be documented in writing at the time of refusal. This written documentation should be maintained on file with as much pertinent detail as possible.

An alternative is to hire a licensed, insured caterer or bar to run the beer garden with its own bartenders. Choosing this option transfers much of the exposure to the contracted vendor; however, it is not without risks. *Members are encouraged to review Chapter 11: Vendors and Exhibitors for additional risk management concerns.*

LAW ENFORCEMENT/ SECURITY

Requiring that licensed peace officers be present as security where drinking alcohol is planned is good risk management. A rule of thumb is one uniformed officer for every 200 attendees. Law enforcement's presence helps discourage overconsumption and can aid in dealing with those who object to being refused service.



Presence of law enforcement where alcohol is served can help reduce rowdy behavior.