

## **PlaySafe and Live Well!**

Welcome to PlaySafe, LLC's informational column. Every month we will work hard to provide you with up-to-date information on topics related to parks, recreation, health, wellness, and physical education. Our hope is that by providing you with detailed information, you will go forward and positively change the world. If you have questions or comments, or if you would like to share your thoughts, please contact us through this web site. Thanks. Now PlaySafe and live well!

A Moveable Feast: Food and Parks

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Nick recently attended (as a guest) a public planning meeting for a new Parks Master Plan for the downtown of the city where he lives. It was a typical public planning meeting; people of various backgrounds, different interests, and diverse needs plying their priorities over tables of maps, watching presentations and listening to consultants and public administrators demonstrating the value of what was being proposed. As the participants all sat down and tucked into comforting cups of coffee and hot chocolate, buttery muffins, fresh bananas and ripe apples, it became clear that what was really uniting all the attendees was the food.

This isn't news to anyone. We all know how food can bring people together. Frequently, meals are the centerpieces of cherished memories. Our nation comes together to celebrate holidays over Thanksgiving tables. Families bond and share in laughter at Sunday dinners. Communities heal and recover through feeding each other after natural disasters. And, at the end of the day, we all need and enjoy eating.

An important element of eating that is sometimes forgotten is the locations at which we are eating. Many times, where we eat is just as important as what we eat. It is indisputable that people love to eat outside. We love to have picnics in the parks, to gobble popcorn at the Drive In Movie, to take snack breaks while hiking and riding bikes; and who doesn't want peanuts and Cracker Jack at the old ball game. With all this in mind, we need to think of ways we can incorporate and maximize our opportunities to bring food to our parks and recreation spaces and facilities! Below are some ideas that may help you, your community, and your department agency rethink the way food can connect with parks and recreation.

## Picnics

Picnicking is delightful. Many of us remember going on picnics with our loved ones on sunny days, and it continues to be one of PlaySafe staff's favorite activities in parks. No matter where you go, be it San Francisco's grand Golden Gate Park, New York City's Central Park, the beaches of Hawaii, or your neighborhood pocket-park playground, you will see people picnicking. Picnicking actually comes in many different forms; families and friends create elaborate spreads with gourmet fixings, co-workers enjoy takeout on a park bench, and people will scour for the finest places to sit and relax while dining. Providing safe and comfortable places for people to enjoy eating should be a critical part of our responsibility. Our role should be to facilitate the ease and comfort of picnicking. As you can imagine, the checklist for providing this can be long, so here are a few tips and general guidelines, which help maximize picnicking in parks:

- **Comfort-** A Key to picnicking is comfort and ease. For this, tables and benches should be placed in areas that have access to both sun and shade, so they can be enjoyed at different times throughout the day. It is vital that access be made available to as many people as possible, please use the ADA requirements in all your designs. Also, season should be taken into account, especially in shoulder seasons such as fall or spring when leaves and vegetation may be sparse. You must also pay attention to wind patterns, insect levels and address as necessary. With natural insect control strategies and thoughtful plantings and walls, outdoor nuisances can be minimized and areas can become even more enjoyable. Seating can also be composed of chairs, tables, benches and grassy or soft substrate surfaces.
- **Maintenance -** No one wants to eat in a dirty or damaged area. Benches and tables should be well maintained, ensuring that seating areas don't fail (protecting the user as well as you from potentially troublesome litigation). Table tops and benches should be clean and secured to their posts, with finishes in good condition to avoid chipped paint and splintered wood.
- **Beauty-** A primary reason people like picnicking in our parks is to enjoy the beauty of being outdoors. We must ensure that trash receptacles are cleared consistently and frequently to avoid trash (and odor) from accumulating. Trees and shrubs must be trimmed so they look nice, grow properly, preserve welcoming views, and keep our patrons safe. When our plants are overgrown they may impede our safety officers and guest from seeing situations that can be harmful. Also, remove or rehab plants or grassy areas that are dying or dead. No one likes sitting on a dead lawn. If your community is experiencing water shortages, consider exchanging your current plants with native or low water use plants that don't require large amounts of water, and can still create beautiful spaces.

With a few simple commitments, you can provide beautiful and accessible areas for enjoying a picnic or lunch outside.

## Concessions and Festivals

Pound for pound, the most popular way to eat outside is by getting something (usually fried and delicious) at a concession stand. Offering concessions not only adds to the enjoyment of our parks and facilities but is a great way to incorporate additional revenue streams and partner with the business community in your town. Whether it is at a ballpark, or gourmet snack stand at a food festival in the city park, there are some specific issues to be aware of.

- Cleanliness and Safety standards- Just like any other critical part of a sporting facility, ensuring that all equipment that comes into contact with food or is used in the preparation process is functioning properly and well maintained is key. Refrigeration units, gas lines for stove tops, fryers and grills, ventilation and most importantly sinks and sanitation need to be evaluated constantly. Staff must also learn how to correctly handle food items. Mishandled food can cause serious injury or even death. Those aging wooden shanties selling funnel cakes may transport our memories to another time and place, but ultimately food safety should always be a priority.
- Expense- Maintaining and replacing equipment can be costly. Incorporating food service needs into your parks and recreation master plan and capital improvement plans can save much needed cash down the road with a little time and preparation.
- Crowd control and access- Is your concession area packed during half-time? Is there sufficient space for families, attendees and players to move around? Emergency plans including items such as access and crowd control are critical not only in the stands, but anywhere lines form, including at the restrooms and concession stands.

Just as with anything else at parks and recreation facilities, eating and drinking must have some controls and signage allowing our guest to know what they can and cannot eat.

Many facilities have rules such as:

The City of Rio Rancho, New Mexico has signs and enforces a No Alcoholic Beverages Policy at their sports complex (consisting of 7 baseball/softball fields, 7 acres of open fields for football, soccer, lacrosse and such, a dog park and tennis courts). Police can and are contacted if necessary.

The Parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana includes the following in their park rules: Use of fire is prohibited except in grills. Tabletop style grills are not allowed on picnic tables, benches or bleachers. All charcoal from grills, grease from fryers and water with added chemicals or seasonings such as from seafood boils must be taken with you when you leave. Dumping of charcoal, grease or impure water onto park grounds is prohibited.

Kellogg Park in San Diego uses a simple rule: Food is allowed, but no glass containers or alcohol.

Agencies are increasingly looking to alternative revenue sources (a food service can be one) as a way to make their sporting facilities more successful and most cities and towns use food festivals as part of their programming. With the right planning and commitment, concessions and other food service options are great amenities to provide to your users.

Communities across America are finding ways to unite and inspire their residents by bringing our love of food outside. Our cities have a plethora of opportunities to enjoy a meal, drink, or snack outside in the sunshine. To get the most out of these opportunities, you should consider collaborating with other community groups who focus on food; your local farmers market, school garden program, urban foraging group, or nutrition program at a local university are great partners.

And if you need any convincing of the merits of eating outside (or just need a break from the office), grab a sandwich, a refreshing drink and head to your favorite park. Bon appetit!

The following are some examples of food regulations:

City of San Mateo, CA Rules and Regulations on Picnic Areas

<http://www.cityofsanmateo.org/index.aspx?NID=719>

City of Austin, TX Policy on Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/sustainable-urban-agriculture>

City of Denver, CO Parks and Recreation Alcohol Policy

<https://www.denvergov.org/Portals/747/documents/policy/AlcoholPolicy.pdf>

County of San Diego, CA Parks and Recreation Vending Machine Policy

[http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/PDFs/01\\_San%20Diego%20Parks%20and%20Rec%20Vending%20Fact%20Sheet\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/PDFs/01_San%20Diego%20Parks%20and%20Rec%20Vending%20Fact%20Sheet_FINAL.pdf)

City of Vancouver, WA Mobile Food Vending (Food Truck and Cart) Policy

<http://www.cityofvancouver.us/ced/page/mobile-food-vending>

City of Portland, OR Parks and Recreation Nutrition Standards for Facilities

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/312791>

City of Albuquerque, NM Park Use Rules and Regulations incl. Alcohol, BBQ, Fun Jumps and Food Vending

<http://www.cabq.gov/parksandrecreation/parks/park-use-rental>

City of San Clemente, CA Sportsfield Rules incl. Concessions and Styrofoam

<http://san-clemente.org/home/showdocument?id=7994>

City of Fayetteville, NC Vendor Concession Guide

[http://www.fcpr.us/concession\\_and\\_vendor\\_guidelines.aspx](http://www.fcpr.us/concession_and_vendor_guidelines.aspx)

City of Portland, OR Parks and Recreation Parks Concession Manual

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/303191>

City of NYC, NY Parks and Facilities Concession Standards

[http://www.nyc.gov/html/mocs/downloads/pdf/fcrc\\_rules.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/mocs/downloads/pdf/fcrc_rules.pdf)

Healthy Concessions Guide, Fairmount Park Conservatory, Philadelphia, PA

<https://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/Fairmount-Concessions-Guide.pdf>