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Barbecuing Poultry for Large Groups



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Would you like to serve something different, yet simple and easy, at your church picnic or your firm's annual outdoor party? Or is your 4-H Club or Scout Troop looking for a money-making project? Then try a barbecue with turkey or chicken! You're sure to please your friends and neighbors.

Barbecues for large groups are not difficult. With the right equipment and a little advance planning, you can serve hundreds quickly with a minimum of labor. Barbecues for community celebrations serving several thousand people are common. If you would like to give one a try, the tips and suggestions in this folder will help.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Buying Chicken

Young chicken fryers ranging from 1½ to 3½ pounds ready-to-cook are best for barbecuing. Birds up to 2½ pounds make two generous servings when split in half. Heavier birds can be quartered. Select the size that best fits your needs.

When possible, have the supplier deliver the birds already split or quartered, ready for the grill. This saves much time and labor. There is no point in having necks and giblets brought to the barbecue site. Ask the supplier the keep these.

If only whole birds are available, split the fryer by cutting along one side of the backbone from tail head to shoulder. A linoleum knife is excellent for this purpose. Remove the keel bone, if desired, by "popping" it out as shown in figure 1. Complete separation by cutting down the midline of the breast. If the birds are to be quartered, separate the thigh-and-leg from the breast-and-wing by cutting from the midpoint of the back to the tip of the keel.

Buy only top quality birds and keep them iced or refrigerated up to cooking time.

Buying Turkey

Turkeys are available in a wider variety of sizes and forms. Young fryer-roasters in the 4- to 6-pound range can be split and quartered as described above. Larger birds can be conveniently cut into a number of servings before barbecuing (figure 2); or the whole birds can be barbecued on a spit (figure 3) for carving in the usual manner. Yields are generally better from larger birds, but big birds also require more barbecuing time.

A more convenient form of turkey for large groups is the boneless roast. This relatively new product of breast

Photos courtesy of Minnesota Turkey Growers Association.

and thigh meat tied into a roll is now marketed by many stores and meat wholesalers. Rolls barbecue very uniformly on a spit, and make possible very good portion control. You can slice them with either a sharp knife or a conventional meat slicing machine. Each serving contains both white and dark meat (figure 4).

Equipment

Pits for large barbecues can be constructed in several ways. Any structure designed to confine heat around the birds will work. Portable pits made of metal sidewalls 2 feet high (figure 5) are very popular because the sections are easily assembled and dismantled. The Minnesota Turkey Growers Association, St. Paul, and the Department of Poultry Science, University of Minnesota, have some metal pits for loan.

You can also build satisfactory pits from lightweight building blocks (figure 6). Do not use heavy cement blocks; they are more likely to crack from the heat. Stack the blocks three courses high (without mortar), making the pit 2½ blocks wide (40 inches) and as long as required. Often blocks can be borrowed from a local building supply firm and returned since normally there is no damage.

The simplest grill is nothing more than 1-inch by 1-inch or 1-inch by 2-inch welded wire supported by small pipes or rods laid across the pit at 3- to 4-foot intervals. However, the sandwich type grill (figure 7) is more convenient because all pieces of chicken or turkey are turned at once instead of individually.

For good sanitation, clean grills just prior to using. In one or more pits build a fast fire from paper and cardboard to blaze up through the grills to burn off oil and residue clinging to wires. Several grills may be stacked on a single pit. Then dry-brush or wash with water and

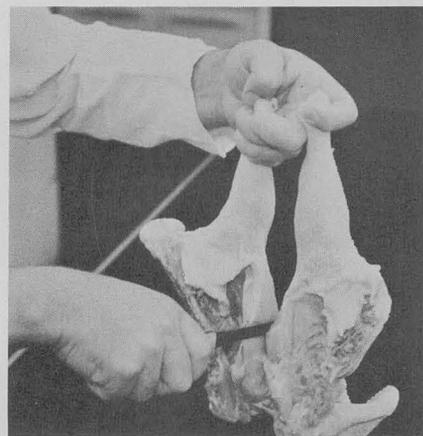


Figure 1. Left: Splitting the bird down the back with a linoleum knife. Center: "Popping" the keel bone out to simplify splitting. Right: Final splitting with a regular knife.

detergent if available. Following the barbecue, store the grills without cleaning to minimize rusting.

When a large number of whole birds or rolls are to be barbecued on a spit, special equipment (like that shown in figure 8) is needed. The spit is driven by an electric motor.

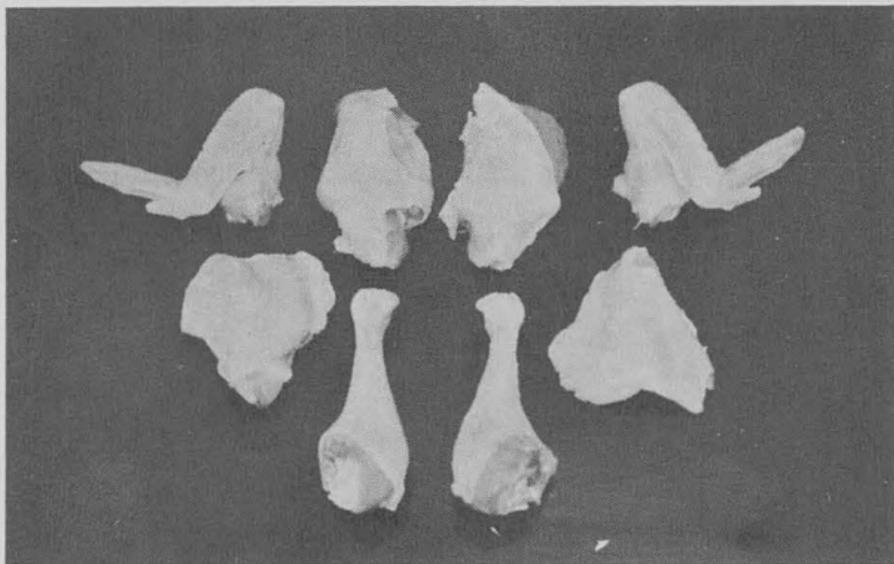


Figure 2. A fryer-roaster turkey cut into 1/2-pound servings before barbecuing.

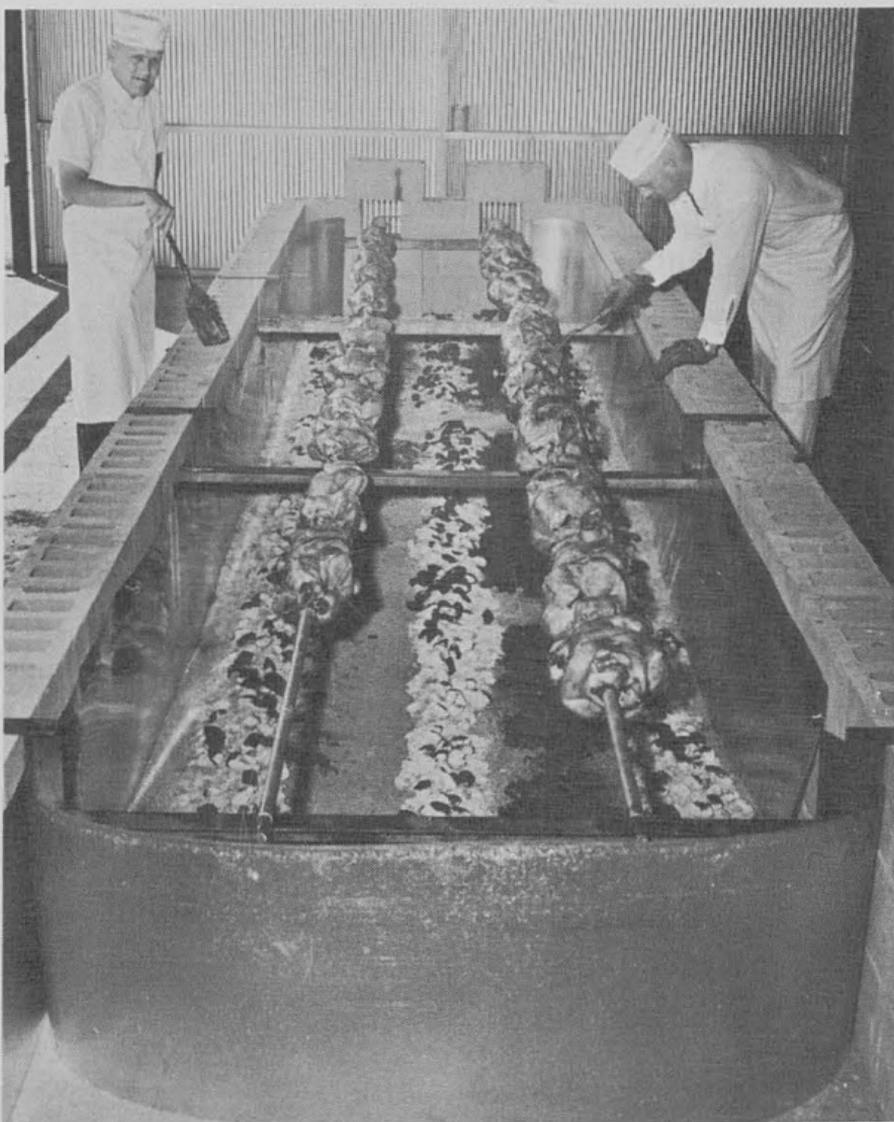


Figure 3. Whole birds barbecued on a spit.

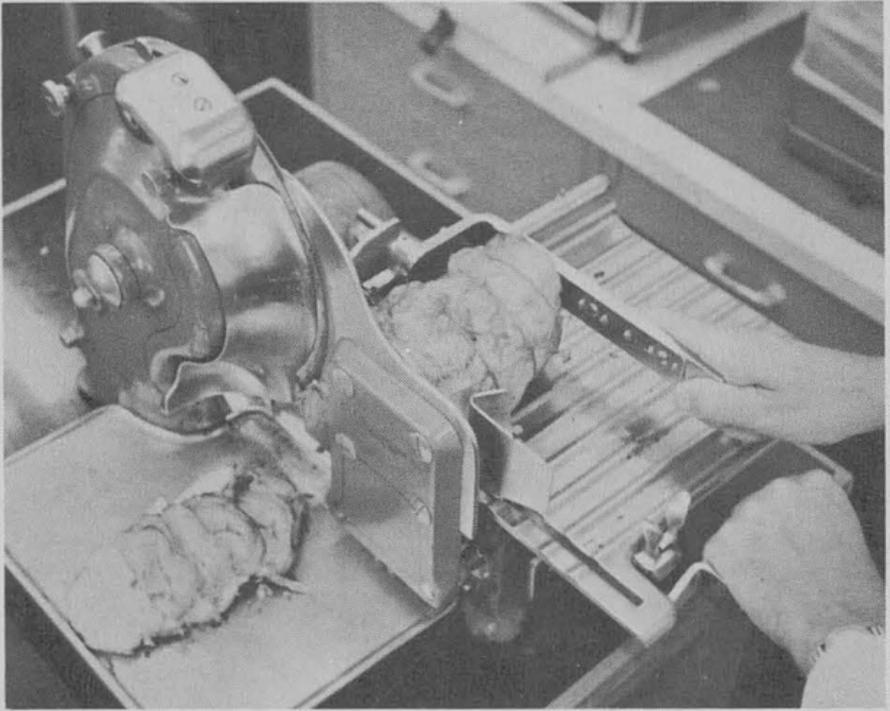


Figure 4. Slicing the rolled roast.

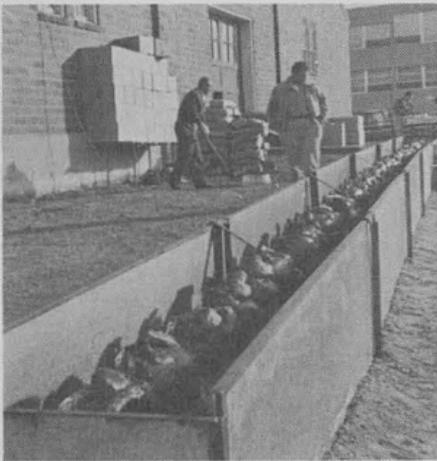


Figure 5. Portable metal-walled pit in use.

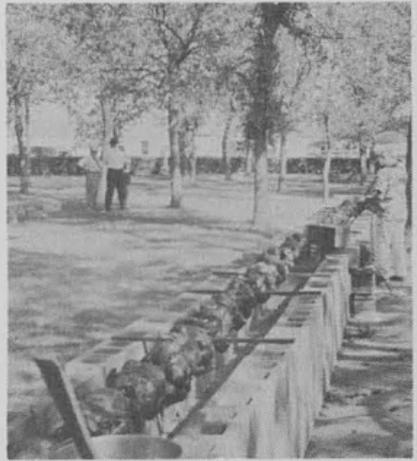


Figure 6. Cinder-block pit in use with spit.

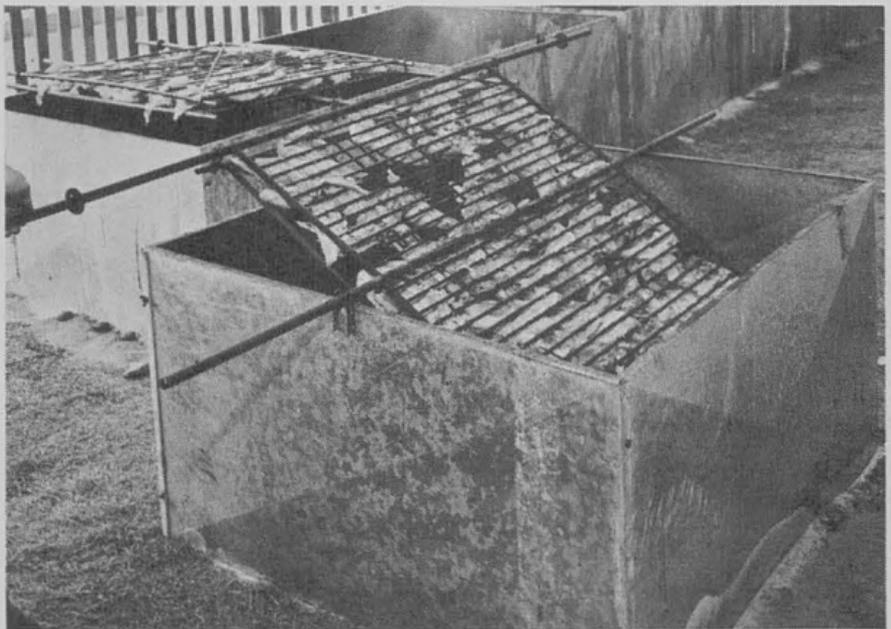


Figure 7. Sandwich-type grill pivots in the middle for quick, easy turning.

Fuel and Fire

Many brands of charcoal are available. Some start more quickly, give off more heat, and last longer than others. Buy by brand name rather than price. Charcoal in briquet form is most satisfactory.

You will need approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of charcoal per serving. The exact amount depends on weather conditions and type of pit. Cold, windy weather increases requirements; block pits need more charcoal than metal pits. If you are cooking more than one batch, less fuel will be required after the first lot.

Prepare the fire by placing 20- to 25-pound bags of charcoal on their sides at 3- to 4-foot intervals the length of the pit. Open the side of each bag with a knife and add 1 pint of kerosene per bag before igniting. Permit the piles of charcoal to burn 20 to 30 minutes undisturbed. By this time the kerosene odor should disappear and white or gray spots will appear, indicating that the charcoal is burning. Now use a rake or shovel to spread the briquets evenly if you are barbecuing grills of cut-up poultry. When cooking with a spit, arrange the briquets in a neat row beneath the birds or on both sides.



Figure 8. Special grill for large quantity of rolled roasts.

Barbecue Sauces

Your choice of a barbecue sauce is unlimited. It can be very simple, such as melted butter and salt, or a complex one containing all your favorite spices. However, when barbecuing for a large group, it is usually wise to select a mild sauce with a limited number of ingredients. Such a one is the popular New England Sauce:

New England Sauce
(for 100 servings)
1 gallon vinegar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon water
2 quarts cooking oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pound salt

Brush or spray the sauce on the cooking halves or parts of poultry frequently. New, long-handled dish mops work quite well. Stainless steel portable pressure sprayers of 2- to 3-gallon capacity are very convenient; however, only thin sauces of the New England type can be sprayed without clogging the nozzle.

Barbecuing the whole bird or rolled roast is much easier if it is injected with a sauce 12 to 24 hours ahead of time. An internal baster makes it possible to put the sauce deep into muscle tissues, and the spicy flavors become distributed during the marinating period.

Minnesota Sauce for Injection

- 2 cups water
- ½ cup salt
- 2 cups vinegar or lemon juice
- 1 ounce tabasco sauce
- ¾ tablespoon garlic juice

Inject about ½ cup of sauce into each 8 or 10 points of the bird and 5 or 6 points on the roll. A 14- to 16-pound turkey will absorb 1½ to 2 cups of sauce. Make the injection directly through the plastic wrap on the bird or roll so that you retain any drainage of sauce during marinating. Hold under refrigeration.

If the bird or roll is short on fat, you may add ¼ pound melted butter to the above recipe or inject it separately. This oozes out during cooking, reducing the need for basting and adding to the juiciness and flavor. You can also include other spices, singly or in combination. The following list is a guide for quantities to use for each turkey:

- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1½ teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon onion juice
- 1 teaspoon liquid smoke
- 4 teaspoons sugar

Cooking

Place halves, quarters, or cut-up pieces of poultry on the grill skin side up and brush with barbecue sauce immediately. Cook for 15 minutes, turn, and baste. Then cook for another 15 minutes, turn, and baste. Thereafter turn every 5 to 6 minutes and baste after each turning to add flavor and retain juiciness. When sandwich grills are not available, turn individual pieces with tongs or clean, white canvas gloves. Do not use forks which puncture the skin and allow juices to escape.

Whole birds and boneless rolls must be well balanced and trussed on the spit. Tie wings securely to the body and legs to the tailhead. Insert the spit through the body cavity as close to the breast as possible. If the bird or roll has been injected with barbecue sauce, basting is usually unnecessary. If not, brush with sauce every 5 minutes.

Slow cooking is the secret to successful barbecuing.

This requires only a moderate amount of heat. Extensive blistering of the skin shows that the fire is too hot. To remedy this, raise the grill or spit if your equipment permits. In an emergency sprinkle water on the hot coals. More frequent turning of the pieces of poultry also helps.

No one likes "rare" poultry, so **never serve anyone undercooked chicken or turkey.** Doneness can be checked in several ways. For split and quartered birds, the end-point is reached when the drumstick easily turns loose at the thigh joint. For whole birds, a meat thermometer is much more reliable. Insert it in the thick muscle of thigh or breast, but do not let the bulb touch the bone. An end-point of 185° F. is suggested for whole birds and 175° F. for rolls. The cooking times listed in table 1 are only approximate; use them for planning purposes rather than when measuring doneness.

Menus

In selecting your menu, remember to keep it simple so that the accent is on the barbecued chicken or turkey. Serving is much easier if you choose items which require little advance preparation or portion control. For example, individual packages of potato chips, ice cream cups, and ½-pint milk cartons present no distribution problems. Throwaway plates, cups, forks, and spoons also simplify the cleanup!

The budget is an important consideration, especially if the barbecue is a money-making project. With careful planning and buying it is possible to keep cost per serving of chicken or turkey below \$.50. This includes barbecue sauce and charcoal. Total cost depends on the extent of the menu, but a very substantial meal can be served for \$.75 to \$.85.

Table 2 suggests some menu items and quantities required. The exact amount of each is determined not only by total number to be served but also by the proportion of adults to children, the weather, and the size of individual servings. If you overestimate and have barbecued birds left over, you can usually sell them to customers who would like to take some home.

Table 1. Cooking timetable

Poultry item	Cooking time in hours
Chicken halves or quarters.....	1½
Turkeys:	
Quarters.....	2¼
½-pound serving.....	1½
14- to 16-pound.....	4*
16- to 20-pound.....	5*
20- to 24-pound.....	6*
4- to 5-pound roll.....	3

* End-point temperature of 185° F. is the most reliable guide.

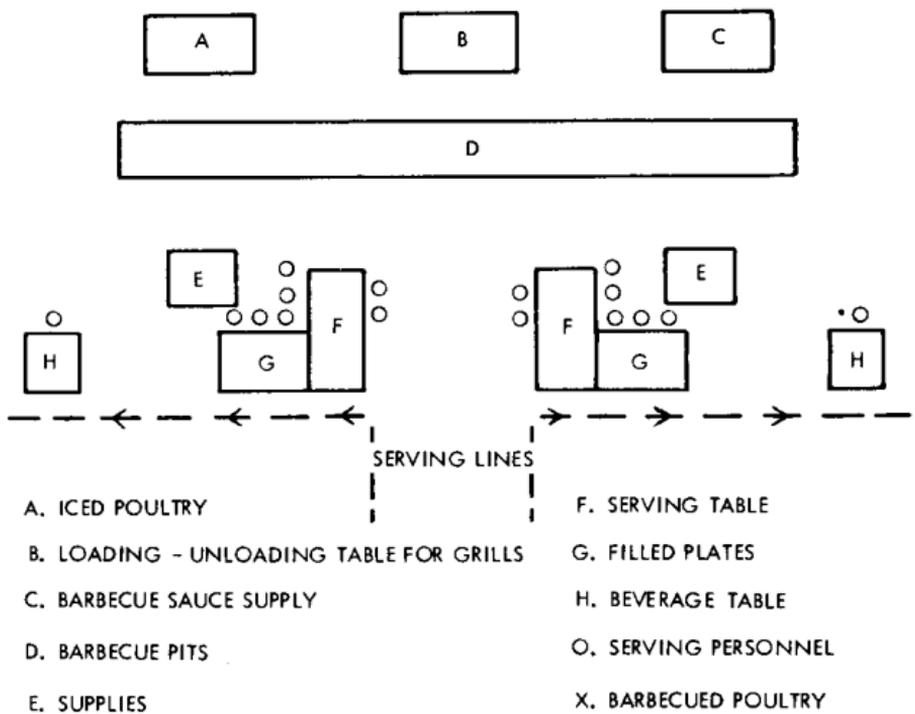


Figure 9. Serving-line organization.

Serving

You can serve hundreds of people in a matter of minutes if your serving line is well organized. Figure 9 suggests one arrangement that works well. Ropes hung from temporary posts are useful in defining the serving area and guiding people through the lines. Strategically placed arrows and signs also expedite traffic flow. Place food on the plate in assembly line fashion, each server adding one item as the plate is passed along. The complete meal is then picked up as a unit by the customer with no time lost in decision-making. You may dispense beverages and desserts at a separate location.

When the birds finishing cooking, transport them from grill or spit to serving tables in clean cardboard boxes or metal containers lined with lockèr paper. If pit equipment is limited and you must cook more than one batch, the birds will stay hot in tight containers for 1 to 2 hours. Cardboard insulates quite well. Metal containers may be held in a warm pit with a small amount of burning charcoal.

Put your cooks and servers in white aprons and chef's hats to make the operation more tidy and attractive. Be aware of the dangers of food spoilage. See that equipment is kept clean and all food handled in a sanitary manner.

Organization

If the sponsoring group is organized into special committees, responsibilities can be delegated and the workload divided. A general chairman is needed to organize and coordinate. Here's what your committees might do:

Publicity and tickets—Advertise the barbecue, sell and collect tickets, pay all bills, and present a final financial report.

Food—Select the menu; order food, poultry, sauce ingredients, beverages, plates, napkins, and other serving accessories; prepare the sauce; serve all food.

Pit and equipment—Provide pits, grills, charcoal, kerosene, rake, shovel, sprinkling can, gloves, basting equipment, tables, and chairs; set up pits; load grills; baste and barbecue the birds.

Clean-up—Dispose of excess food; return borrowed equipment; leave the grounds clean; make sure fire is out.

Parking and traffic—If the barbecue is very large, parking and traffic in and out may need supervision.

Table 2. Menu list, with quantities necessary

Item	Number of persons			
	50	100	300	500
Chicken broilers.....	Buy number of halves or quarters desired.			
Barbecue sauce.....	1 gal.	2 gal.	6 gal.	10 gal.
Turkey (pounds).....	38	75	225	375
Boneless roast..... (pounds)	18	35	100	170
Cranberry sauce..... (2 tablespoons per serving)	2 qt.	4 qt.	8 qt.	20 qt.
Cole slaw..... (½ cup per serving)	6 qt.	12 qt.	36 qt.	60 qt.
Baked beans.....	1½ gal.	3 gal.	9 gal.	15 gal.
Potato chips.....	¾-oz. package per person			
Pickles.....	3 qt.	6 qt.	18 qt.	30 qt.
Rolls.....	2 small dinner rolls per person			
Butter.....	1½ lb.	3 lb.	9 lb.	15 lb.
Coffee.....	3 gal.	6 gal.	18 gal.	30 gal.
Coffee cream.....	1 qt.	2 qt.	6 qt.	10 qt.
Sugar.....	1 lb.	2 lb.	6 lb.	10 lb.
Milk*.....	12 pt.	25 pt.	75 pt.	100 pt.
Ice cream cups.....	50	100	300	500

* Estimated on half-pints for adults also drinking coffee; youth groups will need more.



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