**Banquet Menus and Planning**

**Introduction:** They type of menu to use at your banquet is as varied as the menu of a five star restaurant. Menus can range from the simple to the extravagant. It all depends on you situation, finances, tradition, etc. The following menus and organizational suggestions are to serve as examples to help you choose and create the best menu for your awards banquet.

**Simple, Economic and Tasty!**

A. **Potluck:** The term potluck refers to the time honored “covered dish” tradition that is as much a part of America as mom, apple pie and baseball. Each family attending is asked to bring some type of a food dish that will provide 5 servings. This method creates a smorgasbord of food, much of it home cooked that will delight the palate and fill your tummy! Best of all, it’s free for your chapter. There few top restaurants that can lay out a spread more delectable than this variety of home cooking can provide.

**Considerations:**

1. **Providing Balance:** While potluck certainly provides variety, you may need to do some advance organization to make sure that you don’t end up with too many desserts, not enough main dishes and no bread. Some suggestions:

   a. Assign parts of the meal to each class or year of membership. Depending on the size of your chapter and number attending your banquet, you may want to assign a food item to each member or just to each family of an FFA member.

      1. First year members – Dessert
      2. 2\textsuperscript{nd} year members – Meat dish
      3. 3\textsuperscript{rd} year members – Salads and Bread
      4. 4\textsuperscript{th} year members – Vegetable dish
      5. Chapter will provide drinks such as tea, lemonade, water, coffee, etc.

2. **Guests:** For special guests, your speaker, those being honored for support, etc., you will need to include enough food for them. It is shows poor manners to invite a guest to your banquet and ask them to bring their own food. (Exception: You may have some parents of FFA members who are also honored guests. In these cases, most parents are more than happy to provide a covered dish even if they are being honored.)

3. **Serving:** With a potluck meal, generally the food is placed in several rows of tables and people serve themselves. It still would be a good idea to have a Serving Committee in place. There duties would consist of pouring tea, coffee, water, etc. They also would be responsible for taking tea and coffee around to the guests after they have been seated and are enjoying the meal. Another serving idea is to cooperate with another organization on the serving. For example, your chapter might contact the FBLA chapter (or some other organization) to serve the drinks. Then when they have their banquet, FFA member could return the favor.
B. The Combination Plate: The combination plate is a mix of potluck and catering. The chapter may decide to assign a food committee the task of organizing a menu and securing help to prepare the main dishes. Families of FFA members would provide desserts. A sample menu might include ham or roast beef, green beans, tossed salad and pie.

Considerations: This type of menu provides a simple yet enjoyable meal in a more formal arrangement. In organizing this, there are several items to think about:

1. Food Safety and Preparation: It is important that when cooking any type of food, that proper methods be used. This is especially true when cooking for large groups. A few suggestions:

   a. Instruct the food committee to contact a parent or group of parents, to take charge of preparing the meat and vegetable dishes. The parents who help prepare this portion of the meal would not be responsible for furnishing desserts such as cakes, pie, etc.

   b. Contact the person in charge of your school lunch program. They will have knowledge of food preparation for large groups. In some schools, you may be able to hire the lunch staff to assist in the preparation, use of lunchroom facilities etc. They would also be helpful in planning how much food to order for a large group of people.

2. Organization and Planning: This will require more organization and advance planning than the Pot Luck option. You will need several groups of people working together – FFA members, parents, school lunch, etc.

3. Expense: With this option the meat, vegetables, bread, everything but the dessert will need to be purchased. You will need to check to see if this is covered in the budget. A decision will also have to be made if the chapter needs to charge for the banquet meal or if the chapter will sponsor it.

4. Serving: You will need additional servers with this meal plan. If parents have been involved in cooking the meal, don’t ask them to also serve it. They have done enough and this is your banquet. There are several options when serving the food.

   a. Cafeteria Style – Persons attending will pick up their plates and pass through the serving line where the serving committee will place the meat, vegetables, bread, salad, etc. on their plates. This moves the line along much faster compared to allowing people to serve themselves.

   b. Restaurant Style – It would be a good idea to have a courtesy corps to direct guests to their seats. Instruct everyone to be seated. FFA members act as waiters
and bring the food and drink to the guests. This is the fastest method of serving a large crowd provided you have enough FFA members. It also involves more members in the banquet.

c. Meat & Pie Slicers and Salad Choppers - Just prior to serving, people will be needed to slice the meat and pies for ease of serving. The meat can be sliced in the roasters it was cooked in and then served directly from them. Pie should be sliced and placed on small plates and sat on the dining table prior to start of banquet. If serving tossed salad, or any salad for that matter, the salads should be placed in bowls and sat on the dining tables, next to the dessert, just prior to start of banquet.

d. Cooperation: As stated with the potluck option, you could contact another school organization to do all of the serving. FFA members could return the favor by serving at the participating organization’s banquet.

**Formal and Time Saving**

A. **Catered:** This is the least amount of work for chapter members and advisors. However, it is also the most expensive. The catered meal is prepared by an outside source, such as a local restaurant or catering service. It is the most formal of the options discussed thus far.

**Considerations:**

1. **What Can You Afford:** While catered can be very nice, it is costly. The roast beef dinner discussed in the Combination Plate example would probably cost $3.00-$4.00 if prepared by the chapter and parents. A catered roast beef dinner with the same trimmings may range from $8.00-$15.00 per plate.

2. **Best Use of Funds:** The chapter may want to consider if there is a better way to use funds that will provide more benefit to members other than a catered meal.

3. **Time Saver:** Any advisors and FFA members who have been through the banquet experience can tell you they can be stressful. A catered meal takes away one of the big stress factors and time consumers of banquet operation.

**Sample Menus**

A. **Combination Plate Menus Prepared By Chapter:** Ease of preparation is a key factor here.

1. **Main dish:** Roast Beef (see cooking instructions)
   
   Vegetable: Green Beans
   
   Salad: Tossed Salad
   
   Potato: Baked or Scalloped
   
   Bread: Pre-baked dinner rolls
   
   Dessert: Pies baked by FFA member families.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR ROASTS: These instructions are for a typical electric roaster used to cook at roast weighing 12-15 lbs. This size of roast will serve approximately 40-50 people. 

Ingredients Needed: Roast, oven bag for each roast, packet of Campbell’s Dry Onion soup mix for each roast, water.

- Place one inch of water in bottom of roaster.
- Put roast in oven bag and place one pouch of Campbell’s Dry Onion soup mix in oven bag with roast.
- Set roaster at 250 and cook for approximately 12 hours or until roast is cooked enough to fall apart.

If using this method of meat preparation, figure out how many people you need to serve, ask families to volunteer roasters and services to cook the roast. Print of the above instructions and send the roast, oven bag and onion soup home with the volunteer cooks. If the follow the instructions, its very simple, takes very little work. Instruct volunteers to have the roast cooked and at the school a minimum of one hour before the banquet so it can be sliced and made ready for serving.

2. Main dish: Lasagna (Not as hard as it sounds, see notes at end of menu)
   Salad: Tossed Salad
   Bread: French bread
   Dessert: Cherry & Blueberry Cheese cake (Again, easier than it sounds)

Lasagna: There are several food supply companies that handle pre-made food dishes such as lasagna. One such company is the SYSCO Company (www.sysco.com). Lasagna is pre-baked in 9-13 aluminum pans, and shipped to your location. The lasagna needs only to be heated in ovens for a short period of time and its ready to serve! It really is that easy and provides a different menu than most banquet goers are used to eating.

Cheesecake: Using no-bake cheesecakes mixes, found in any supermarket, is an easy and quick way to prepare an excellent dessert dish for your banquet. A group made up of one or two adults and five FFA members can prepare cheesecake for 300 people in about an hour providing that all ingredients are available when preparation of cheesecake begins. Check with your local food supplier for no-bake cheesecake mixes and additional ingredients. Cheesecake is usually cut in smaller pieces than a pie so you can plan on 8 pieces per cheesecake if you are using a regular size pie tin to prepare it in.

3. Condiments: When preparing your own banquet meal, what about condiments such as salad dressing, salt & pepper, sour crème, etc. The easiest method is to buy individual packets of these. Again, school lunch program, super market or other food suppliers can provide these. It makes for easier setup and easier cleanup.
Special Notes on Ordering Food: You have several options to consider when ordering food for your banquet:

1. **Check With School Cafeteria**: There are always lots of jokes about the cafeteria food but the truth is, your school lunch staff have connections to national food companies where they can get just about anything you want. Check with your lunch program coordinator, you might be surprised at what they can get for you.

2. **Local Supermarket**: The advantage of the local supermarket is their connection to national chains and the ability to order large quantities of food. A side benefit is that spending money in your local community helps to build program support.

3. **National Food Companies**: As mentioned before, there are several national food companies. One that works with high schools is SYSCO (www.sysco.com). Your school cafeteria may already be a SYSCO customer. If not, contacting their website can provide you with information about the closest SYSCO distributor. You can order the complete meal or parts from this type of company.

**B. Catered Menus**: The type of menus here are varied and usually are limited by catering service available and budget.

1. **Standard Menu # 1**:
   - Main Dish: Roast Beef
   - Vegetable: Green Beans or Corn
   - Potato: Baked, Scalloped or Mashed
   - Salad: Tossed, coleslaw or jello salad
   - Bread: Dinner Roles
   - Dessert: Cake

   a. Variations: Main dish could be ham, chicken fried steak, loin chop, sirloin steak, etc. Green beans and corn are often chose due to ease of preparation and cost. However, there is nothing set in stone about these vegetables. Salads and desserts have various choices as well. Talk with the caterer of your choice. They will be able to help you with these decisions.