



# Alton Chili Cook-Off Scheduled For Saturday, October 15, Has Been Cancelled

by Sara McGibany  
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ALTON – The Alton Chili Cook-Off which has been a community tradition for 35 years will not happen on October 15, 2022, as planned, and the event's fate in future years is uncertain.

“Earlier this week we were informed by the Madison County Health Department that the way the Alton Chili Cook-Off is conducted is not allowed,” explained Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street who coordinates the event, adding, “I’m not sure when these particular rules were put into place, but we were asked to assume responsibility of planning the event and given the how-to guide in 2013. There was a foodborne illness outbreak at the Belleville Chili Cook-Off in 2016 which apparently caused area Health Department regulations to become stricter.”

The three options for a cook-off to adhere to the Health Department’s guidelines include: only having restaurants or teams who cook in certified kitchens involved, having teams cook everything on-site, or only having judges taste the chili instead of selling tickets to the public. Most of the teams involved with the Alton Chili Cook-Off prepare their chili in a home kitchen, which is not allowed.

Alton Main Street inquired with the registered contestants as to whether they would be able to participate within the parameters set forth by the MCHD, but most of the teams did not have the extra time or equipment required to cook on-site. The additional logistics involved with partnering individuals, organizations, and non-restaurant businesses with certified kitchens will likely result in the event being discontinued.

A minimum of 20 teams are needed to feed upwards of 600 people who attend the event every year. “Only 7 teams would have been able to operate under the MCHD rules and if we were to reduce the number of tickets by two-thirds we would have ended up with a lot of unhappy people on our hands that day,” said McGibany, adding “This is our biggest fundraiser, and we know that hundreds of people look forward to this fun event every year. We certainly share everyone’s disappointment about this development, but we understand that the purpose of the Health Department is to keep everyone safe and healthy.”

Owners of certified kitchens available for use, chili contestants who would be able to operate within the guidelines, and volunteers who would like to assist with figuring out whether the event can return in 2023 are encouraged to contact Alton Main Street. To offer your support with continuing the event in subsequent years, please contact: [sara@altonmainstreet.org](mailto:sara@altonmainstreet.org).