



## 2023 HEARTLAND WHISKEY COMPETITION

### SPIRIT JUDGING PROTOCOLS

Welcome to the **4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Heartland Whiskey Competition** (Sanctioned by the American Craft Spirits Association) to take place on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 at Still 630 Distillery in St. Louis, Missouri.

The Heartland Whiskey Competition was developed to recognize those producers, particularly in the Heartland States, that make exceptional craft whiskey using corn from some of the best farm fields in the United States.

### **Stage One: Receipt and Classification of Spirits.**

All received spirits will be stored in a bonded, secured area at Stumpy's Spirits Distillery in Columbia, IL. Boxes remain sealed until one day prior to the judging whereupon ACSA with a shippers transportation permit will remove the boxes from Stumpy's and deliver to Still 630. The backroom organizing team opens the boxes and sorts the categories in the staging area. Access to the staging area is limited, without exception, to the Heartland Judging Board, the stewards, and relevant Heartland, ACSA and The Still 630 Staff.

## **SPIRIT DEFINITIONS BY CATEGORY**

**(For the complete list of the TTB definitions by category, please refer to the TTB's Beverage Alcohol Manual, Chapter Four, available [HERE](#) in PDF format.)**

### **1. Spirit Categorization**

- a. A "Spirit Category" is defined as the "parent" spirit type, with most categories having multiple sub-categories.
- b. Categories and Sub-Categories shall be as defined by the TTB in Title 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations and must be backed by the TTB-approved COLA.
- c. "Made from Scratch" vs. "Third Party"
  - i. All spirit entry categories shall consist of two make-categories within:  
Made from Scratch and Third Party.

- 1. Example: Bourbon Whiskey will award up to 3 medals to both the Made from Scratch and Third Party-Distilled, totaling up to 6 medals in the category of "Bourbon Whiskey".

#### **ii. Definitions**

- 1. Made from Scratch: a fermented mash/wash that is produced exclusively by original distillation, aged and bottled in-house without any 3rd party spirits being added or blended into the product at any time.
- 2. Third Party Distilled: a spirit that is either distilled in-house and blended with 3rd party spirits or 3rd party spirits blended and bottled.

### **d. Whiskey**

#### **i. Categories**

- 1. Un-aged

2. Aged- two years and under
3. Straight, under four years
4. Straight, four years and over

**ii. Sub-Categories**

1. Straight Whiskey
2. Bourbon Whiskey
3. Blended Whiskey
4. Corn Whiskey
5. Bottled in Bond
6. Four Grain Whiskey (Corn Plus 3)
7. Rye Whiskey (Corn Mash)
8. Flavored Whiskey
9. RTDs ("Whiskey Base" Ready to Drink- MUST include CORN)

**Stage Two: Procedures and Process Rules:**

- Smoking is not allowed at any time during the competition.
  - No perfume/cologne can be worn.
  - Clothing must be free of residual odor (from smoking, perfume/cologne, or poor hygiene). •
- Judges are expected to be professional at all times during judging. Protocols are to be followed as well as specific instructions from the Judging Director.

**Judging Panels:** The Judging Panels consist of a minimum of three and a maximum of five bench judges. The judges are picked to provide a mix of experience. Distillers or consultants with a vested interest in a spirit will not be able to preside over flights in that category.

An overall score between 1 and 100 will be given. Flights of whiskey will be delivered to the panels in unison.

Judges will perform a blind sensory evaluation of the spirits and enter their perceptions on the score sheets provided. The nose, palate, finish, and balance of spirits will be evaluated. Tasting notes and judges' comments will be entered onto the score sheet and collected immediately after that flight is tasted. Rude, sarcastic, or unconstructive comments by judges will not be tolerated.

Each panel will be provided with distilled water, neutral crackers, raw almonds, place-mats, spit buckets, score sheets, pencils, a pencil sharpener, and water glasses.

The utmost care will be taken to ensure that when stewards are pouring the spirits into the glasses, the liquid level in each glass is always uniform so that the judges will be able to accurately assess them.

When the outcome of a flight is determined and tallied by the Judges, the scorecards will be delivered to the staging room by a steward, where the scores will be recorded and copied. The recorder shall enter the medals into the master spreadsheet of entries and compile a complete list of winners. Tasting notes from the judges will be gathered and sorted for distribution, but results and tasting notes will be considered confidential and held in secret until after the awards are announced.

**Scoring:** The scoring of spirits is based on a 100-point system with the points allotted to criteria uniquely weighted to appropriately match each individual category. Consideration of these points will speak to the overall quality of the spirit within its category and against its peers. This feedback will also generate meaningful information for the producers themselves. Spirits will then be assigned a medal based on the average score determined by the following benchmarks:

- 70-79 = Bronze
- 80-89 = Silver
- 90-100 = Gold

The bottom portion of the score sheet asks the judges for input regarding the best qualities of the spirit and also asks how the spirit can be improved.

**Awards:** Judges will award gold, silver and bronze medals for spirits based on the average panel score.

### **Stage III: Best of Sub-Category, Best of State, Best of Show , Farmer-Distiller Award**

We are introducing the “Farmer-Distiller Award” –

*The Farmer-Distiller Award was created by corn state marketing associations. Entry and acceptance into The Farmer-Distiller Award competition does not indicate that corn associations or their agents vetted competitors and concluded that they meet any legal criteria for farmer-distillers.*

Once judging of the flights are complete, the staging room staff will compose a flight of each Best of Sub-Category Spirit, assuming at least 9 products are submitted. Flights will be composed of the top scoring spirits in each sub-category. Judges will not be informed of the previous score or medal assignment of the spirits making up the Best of Sub-Category Spirits flight. Best in Sub-Category Spirits will be drawn from gold medal spirits first. However, if a particular category lacks any gold medal awards, then the top silver, or bronze, medal winners will be drawn.

The scoring of Best in State and Best in Show will be based on the numerical 100-point system focused on overall quality assessment of the spirits. Points will be allotted to appearance, nose, character of the corn, palate, body, alcohol, texture, and finish.

### **Judging Director**

The role of the Judging Director is to oversee all judging operations and to see that all functions are performed smoothly and efficiently. The Judging Director's various duties include determining flights, tallying scores, and answering judge's questions. Finally, the Director is also responsible for compiling tasting notes.

### **Stewards**

The stewards oversee the staging room operations and determine that each flight is correctly selected with like sub-categories and properly poured. They oversee the staff that is tallying the scores and recording the medals. Stewards are responsible for seeing that glasses are cleaned after every flight, ensuring that enough dry glasses are available for successive flights, clearing the glasses away after each flight, and cleaning the spit buckets. Stewards also make sure that the judges are well equipped with water, crackers, and almonds.

### **Recorder**

The recorder will receive the score sheets from and log the average scores, best of categories and medals earned. The recorder will compile a list of the full names of distilleries and spirits receiving medals and determine best of category.

Score sheets with tasting notes will be scanned for archives and possible distribution to the distillers.

Tasting notes will be kept grouped by flight in the order that the flight was served.

Stickers will be placed on each score sheet showing the full name of product and distillery and at the same time covering over the medal recommendations from each judge. Each medal winning bottle will have an appropriate sticker placed on it to demonstrate the medal awarded.

### **Closing**

Besides the accolades, if you medal, you will receive a bottle ribbon, award, and be part of a PR campaign which recognizes your achievement. Of course, the tasting notes will also give you bragging rights (and perhaps some new marketing copy). JOIN US!

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