

[T H E W E S T E R N R O D E O]

Don't let spit tobacco sponsorship stain our American family tradition.



Nothing evokes the Wild West like the great American rodeo. The bucking broncos, the bullriders, the real-life cowboys thrilling wide-eyed boys and girls as they rope a runaway steer at full gallop. As much as rodeos are about tradition and history, they are also about American families and their communities.

But lately, there are troubling signs that rodeos are changing and unless local officials take action, rodeos may not survive as family-friendly events that appeal to the best of their communities. These days, when the rodeo comes to town, trouble arrives with it, the latest kin of the Marlboro Man. Rodeos are used to market deadly, disfiguring cancer-in-a-can — spit tobacco.

Local officials know how critical a successful rodeo can be to the local economy. But the high cost of staging rodeos forces local officials to seek corporate sponsors. Too often it's tobacco companies who eagerly sign on. That's why today's rodeo experience is likely to be a tobacco carnival, with spit tobacco ads plastered everywhere — on the scoreboard, the arena, even on the competitors.

Spit tobacco causes oral cancer and heart disease. It's more addictive than cigarettes. Given the high price our communities pay for tobacco addiction, should we aid and abet deceptive marketing strategies designed to hook new and younger tobacco users?

For generations of American families, the rodeo has been a vibrant celebration of the rugged, pioneering spirit that won the West. To sell such a special part of our American experience to Big Tobacco, is to betray our history and our values. It's something that should never be for sale.



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