

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

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



All across the country, nothing evokes the Wild West like the great American rodeo. For generations of American families, the rodeo has been a celebration of the rugged, pioneering spirit that won the West. The bucking broncos, the bullriders in leather chaps, 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, rodeos are also about American families and the communities they live in.

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 critically important a successful rodeo is to the local economy. For many communities, the rodeo is the biggest event of the year, drawing thousands of people. But the high cost of staging rodeos forces local officials to seek corporate help and 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 companies have special marketing tents to hand out free samples, off-limits to kids, of course, making them even more curious and eager.

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

Some things just shouldn't be for sale. Rodeos are a special, rich part of our history when a young country moved west and defined the American spirit. To sell such a special part of our American experience to Big Tobacco is to betray our history and our values.

