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Commentary: John Kelso

Who needs a Super Bowl when you've got a fat guy running cross country with a can of Spam on a stick?

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So Houston has the Super Bowl. I'm supposed to be impressed? Austin software trainer John Booher intends to make Spamarama a major tourist destination.

There is even talk of upgrading the annual Austin Spam cookoff by having a fat guy run across America while toting a large can of Spam on a stick.

"I look forward to taking it to the next level," said Booher, who purchased the rights to Spamarama from founder David Arnsberger for \$9,000. "I think it could be an international event and a big tourist event for Austin. I think it could be as big as the Jazz Fest in New Orleans or the running of the bulls. That's my goal."

The running of the Spam. Great idea. People toting Spam would chase innocent bystanders, and those caught would have to eat it. As part of the deal, Arnsberger demanded a free lifetime pass to Spamarama for himself and his children. Arnsberger founded Spamarama in 1978.

In the past, Spamarama, which will happen for the 26th time on April 3 (this time at Waterloo Park), has featured such recipes as Spamalama Ding Dongs, Spamish Fly and Spamachini Alfredo.

To elevate Spamarama to a world-class event, Booher has spoken with the folks at the International Federation of Competitive Eating in New York, an organization that regulates eating competitions such as the Wing Bowl.

"They think it could be cranked up a notch, and people could fly in for the weekend," said Booher, who refers to himself as the Wizard of Austin and is the co-author of "Spamarama: The Cookbook."

Yes, people could fly in for the weekend for Spamarama. They could also take a saliva test.

Booher says the federation suggests ratcheting up Spamarama with a Miss Spamarama Beauty Contest (a frightening thought), a parade and a World Championship Spamburger Eating Contest. Contestants, presumably Texans against New Yorkers, would compete to eat the most Spamburgers -- or as Booher put it, "Spam on bread."

"I thought we could do an us-versus-them thing, Texas versus New York, get the local Bubbas down here to show the New Yorkers how to do it," Booher said. He wants to put on a Spamburger-eating preliminary in February to find three locals who can eat a lot of Spam for the finals against New York.

"If we don't get three people, then I guess I'm eating it," Booher said. "So I hope three people show up."

Another idea Booher got is to treat a can of Spam like the Olympic torch. A large jiggly person would proceed cross country carrying a can of Spam, "and eventually it runs into Spamarama for the opening," Booher said.

"One of my dreams is to not run a torch across the nation but a can of Spam," said George Shea, the federation's chairman. "Do a national run from Maine to Austin and hit every major urban center." Shea wants a fat guy carrying a "big canned Spam on a stick."

"This is not an eco challenge or an iron man challenge; this is a cholesterol challenge," Shea said.

Houston, eat your heart out.

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