Freezing Meat and Poultry

It is important to store meat and poultry safely. Freezing is an excellent way to extend storage time beyond the recommended refrigerated time. UGA Extension recommendations are available to help preserve both the safety and quality of meat and poultry. Having meat and poultry in the freezer can save both time and money and reduce the amount of shopping trips to the grocery store.

Freezing meat and poultry safely is important to stop the growth of microorganisms during storage. Freezing does not sterilize food so be careful when you take it out of the freezer not to let bacteria start growing again. Freezing will slow down the chemical changes that can lead to poor quality or spoilage but not stop them; observe recommended storage times for quality. Select only high-quality fresh meat and poultry to freeze. Freezing does not improve the quality of food, so it is best to freeze at peak quality. Freeze meat and poultry quickly after receiving and store at 0 degrees F to maintain color, flavor, texture and nutritive value.

When preparing meat and poultry for freezing cleanliness is a must! Wash hands with soap and water before and after each touch of raw meat or poultry. To prevent foodborne illness do not cross contaminate. Wash cutting boards, countertops, and all utensils with soap and hot water and rinse. Do not rinse meat and poultry before freezing or cooking.

Correctly packaging meat and poultry for freezing is key to retaining quality. Use moisture-vapor resistant packaging for meat and poultry to make it impermeable to air and moisture. Freezer burn is the result of air contacting the frozen food causing discoloration. Freezer burn is a quality versus safety issue and can be removed before or after cooking; however, if food is heavily freezer burned it is best to discard.

Color changes are normal in frozen foods. Meat can turn brownish due to a lack of oxygen, freezer burn, or lengthy freezer storage. Meat around bones in poultry can darken when pigment is released from the bones into the tissues.

Thawing is another safe food handling issue when handling meat and poultry. There are three acceptable methods for thawing: in the refrigerator, microwave, or in cold water. Follow UGA Extension recommendations for using these safe thawing methods. Never thaw on the countertop or in the sink!

Once meat and poultry have been safely frozen and thawed, use this UGA Extension recommended Consumer Guide for cooking food to the minimum internal safe temperature using a food thermometer. Use UGA Extension food storage guidelines for storing cooked meat and poultry and these tips offered for freezing leftovers safely.

(438 words)

Sources:

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https://www.saferecipeguide.org/how-to-use/

https://nchfp.uga.edu/

https://setp.uga.edu/

Embedded links:

https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze.html

https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/meat.html

https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/poultry.html

https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/cleanliness-helps-prevent-foodborne-illness/ct_index

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