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SOLUTIONS

Feathered Facts

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UF | IFAS Extension | Baker County

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Safe Cooking During the Holidays

With the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays just around the corner, many families will be cooking large feasts for celebration. It is important to remember that all meats, including poultry, have a certain temperature that must be reached during the cooking process to destroy potential pathogens that may reside on or in the meat.

While this issue of *Feathered Facts* will focus on poultry meats, the list to the right covers the safe internal temperature that should be reached for meats to consider them safe. The list is adapted from the Foodsafety.gov website. Specific information about Safe Minimum Cooking Temperatures can be found here.

Category	Temperature (°F)
Ground Meat & Meat Mixtures	165 (Poultry) 160 (Others)
Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb	145
Poultry	165
Pork & Ham	145 (Fresh) 140 (Precooked)
Eggs & Egg Dishes	Firm yolk & white 160
Leftovers & Casseroles	165

Meat and Poultry Labels

All meat and poultry products sold in the U.S. must meet specific quality and safety regulations that are administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Part of this regulation includes labeling which describes the way a meat or poultry product was raised or processed. When selecting meats for your holiday dinner or for any occasion, it is important to recognize some of the terms that are used on packaging labels and what they mean.

Certified—This term implies that FSIS and the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) have officially evaluated the meat product for class, grade or other quality characteristics. If the term is used under other circumstances it must be closely associated with the name of the organization that is responsible for the "certification" process. An example would be "ABC Company Certified Beef".

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Meat and Poultry Labels

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Organic—Products that are labeled "Organic" must consist of at least 95% organically produced ingredients. This is exclusive of water and salt. Other ingredients must consist of approved nonagricultural substances or inorganically produced agricultural products that are not commercially available in organic form. For organic meat and poultry products, this means that the animals used for the meat were reared without regular use of antibiotics and without growth hormones (**note:** growth-promoting hormones are not allowed in the rearing of hogs or poultry).

100 Percent Organic (100% Organic)—Products that are labeled in this manner must contain only organically produced ingredients. This is exclusive of salt and water. Meat and poultry products that are labeled in this manner were reared without the regular use of antibiotics and without growth hormones (**note:** growth-promoting hormones are not allowed in the rearing of hogs or poultry).

Made with Organic Ingredients—Products with this label must contain at least 70% organic ingredients and may list up to three organic ingredients or food groups on the label.

Chemical-Free—This term is **NOT ALLOWED** to be used on labels.

Free-Range (Free-Roaming)—Producers of these products must demonstrate that the poultry has been allowed access to the outdoors. This label does not mean that the animals were raised outside.

Fresh Poultry—Raw poultry that is labeled as "fresh' has never had an internal temperature below 26°F.

Natural—Products that are labeled as "natural" contain no artificial ingredients or added color and have to be minimally processed. This means that the raw product must remain fundamentally unaltered. The label must also explain the use of the term as it applies to the product, such as "No Artificial Ingredients or Added Colorings". This term does not provide indication on how the animal was raised.

No Hormones (pork or poultry)—Hormones are not allowed in the rearing of hogs or poultry in the United States. Because of this, the label **CANNOT** contain claims such as "No Hormones Added" unless it is followed by a statement that says "Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones".

No Hormones (beef)—The term "No Hormones Administered" may be approved for use on the label of a beef product if sufficient documentation is provided to regulators to prove that no hormones have been used in raising the animal.

No Antibiotics (red meat & poultry)—The term "No Antibiotics Added" may be used on the label of products if the producers has supplied sufficient documentation to regulators indicating that the animals were raised without antibiotics.

Young Turkey—The use of this term on the label means that the turkey was processed when it was less than 8 months of age. The turkey can be of either sex.

Kosher—The term "Kosher" may only be used on the labels of meat and poultry products that were processed and prepared under rabbinical supervision.

Halal or Zabiah Halal—These terms may only be used on the labels of federally inspected products that are handled according to Islamic law and under Islamic authority.

For additional information about meat and poultry labeling, please click here.

Official Seal of the U.S. National Organic Program. For additional information about the National Organic Program, please click here.

Products that are not certified as organic cannot claim to be organic on the principal display panel or use the USDA organic seal.

The United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS) oversees the labeling of meat and poultry products in the US. For additional information on labeling, please click here.

Choosing Your Holiday Turkey

While turkey meat has become more popular as a year-round product in luncheon meats and other areas, many families will opt for a whole turkey when it comes to the holidays. There are many selections available to you at your local grocer, but choosing the right turkey for your family can be easy if you follow a few simple guidelines.

Fresh Turkeys

- Allow 1 lb. of meat per person
- Buy your turkey only 1 to 2 days before you plan to cook it.
- Keep the fresh turkey stored in a refrigerated area until ready to cook.
- Do not buy fresh, pre-stuffed turkeys.

Frozen Turkeys

- Allow 1 lb. of meat per person.
- Keep frozen until ready to thaw.
- Turkeys can be kept frozen indefinitely, but for best quality cook within 1 year.
- Only purchase frozen, pre-stuffed turkeys that display the USDA or State mark of inspection.
- Do not thaw frozen, pre-stuffed turkeys before cooking; cook from a frozen state.

An example of the seal placed upon meat and poultry products by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety Inspection Service after they have passed inspection for wholesomeness.

Thawing Your Turkey

There are only three ways to thaw your turkey (or any other frozen meat) safely: 1) in the refrigerator, 2) in cold water, or 3) in the microwave oven.

The size of your turkey will determine the amount of time that it will take to thaw, with larger birds taking the longest time no matter the thawing method. The following guidelines will help you to determine the amount of time that it will take to thaw your holiday bird.

In the Refrigerator

Generally, you will want to allow for 24 hours of thawing time for each 4 to 5 lbs. of turkey. This means that a 4 lb. turkey should take about one (1) day to thaw in the refrigerator. A bird that weighs 16 lbs. should take about four (4) days to thaw. A turkey that has been thawed in this manner may be refrozen

In Cold Water

For cold water thawing, you should estimate that it will take around thirty (30) minutes for each pound of turkey. Change the water every thirty minutes. Do not refreeze a turkey that has been thawed in this manner.

The Microwave

Please check your owner's manual for specifications. Do not refrigerate or refreeze a turkey thawed in this manner. Cook it immediately.

Never thaw frozen meat at room temperature. This can lead to potential bacterial growth .

Time recommendations for thawing turkey in the refrigerator

4 to 12 lbs.	1 to 3 days
12 to 16 lbs.	3 to 4 days
16 to 20 lbs.	4 to 5 days
20 to 24 lbs.	5 to 6 days

Ask the Expert

This month's question relates to poultry meat: **Why do chickens and turkeys have light and dark meat?**

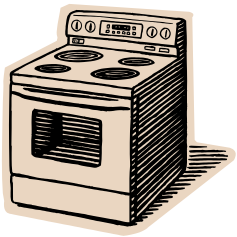
Muscles are used at varying rates. Those muscles that are used more require sufficient oxygen to perform. Myoglobin (similar to hemoglobin) is an oxygen binding protein that is found in the muscles that are used more often. The myoglobin helps to store oxygen for intense periods of use. This is why flightless birds such as chickens and turkeys have dark meat in the leg muscles (the ones they use the most) and light meat in the breast and wings. Other fowl, such as ducks, have dark muscle in the breast.

If you have a question for the expert, email it to baker@ifas.ufl.edu.

Cooking Your Turkey

A fire caused by the unsafe operation of a turkey fryer. For additional safety tips on turkey frying, click here. To see a video on what NOT to do, please click here.

It is often suggested that Ben Franklin endorsed the turkey to be the National Symbol of the United States. This is more myth than fact. For more information, please click here.



There are many methods that are used for cooking a whole turkey. Roasting in the oven is one of the more popular methods along with grilling, smoking and frying. The guidelines listed below will help to make sure that your turkey is cooked properly to reduce the probability of foodborne illness.

Roasting

- Do not set the oven temperature below 325°F.
- For increased safety, it is not recommended to stuff the turkey as the stuffing may not reach the correct temperature. For best results, cook the stuffing separately in a casserole.
- Whole turkeys are safe when cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F. Check this with a meat thermometer at the innermost part of the thigh and wing along with the thickest part of the breast. Do not rely solely on the pop-up indicator for temperature confirmation.

Grilling

- Turkeys that are grilled should be cooked 15 to 18 minutes per pound.
- Do not stuff turkeys that are to be grilled.
- The air temperature in the grill must stay between 225 and 300°F for the previous listed times to be effective.
- Cook to an internal temperature of 165°F, measuring the temperature as you would for roasting.

Smoking

- Turkeys that are smoked should be cooked for 20 to 30 minutes per pound.
- Do not stuff turkeys that are to be smoked.
- Air in the smoker must stay between 225 and 300°F for the previous listed times to be effective.
- Cook to an internal temperature of 165°F, measuring the temperature as you would for roasting.

Deep Fat Frying

- Turkeys that are fried should be cooked 3 to 5 minutes per pound.
- Do not stuff turkeys that are to be fried.
- Oil in the cooker should maintain a temperature of 350°F.
- Cook to an internal temperature of 165°F, measuring the temperature as you would for roasting.

Leftovers

- Discard any turkey, stuffing or gravy left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Refrigerated leftovers should be consumed or thrown out within 3 to 4 days.
- If reheating, make sure to reheat meat products to at least 165°F

For additional information on food safety and turkey, please click here and here.
Additional information on alternative methods of cooking turkey can be found here.

University of Florida | Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
Baker County Extension Service

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