

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MEAT PACKAGING, STORAGE & SAFETY



HOW FRESH ARE YOUR MEAT PRODUCTS?

Very! Our beef, pork and lamb cuts are packaged and delivered to our retail partner locations within days of processing. For example, our fresh pork is typically processed (e.g., cut into chops and packaged) on Monday, shipped to us on Tuesday and sold to customers Wednesday through Friday. Our specialty products (e.g., sausages, and ground beef, lamb and pork) are frozen immediately after they are made. Our retail partners either sell them frozen or fresh, in which case they should be labeled accordingly (e.g., previously frozen).

HOW ARE YOUR MEAT PRODUCTS PACKAGED?

All of our products come in vacuum-seal packaging. Vacuum seal packaging has the advantage of removing the air before making the seal, which extends shelf life and makes it easy to store our products fresh and frozen. Because oxygen is removed, our meats, particularly beef and lamb, will appear on the shelf to be a dark versus bright red. Once out of the package, they will change color and “pink up” in the presence of oxygen.

WHAT IS THE SHELF LIFE ON YOUR PRODUCTS?

That depends on several factors, including the type of product, where it is purchased and storage conditions. It is important to follow the “freeze by” or “sell by” or “use by” dates assigned by the retail grocer. Here are a few general rules of thumb. Boneless products last longer (up to 14 days) than bone-in products (up to 7 days). Products consistently stored at cold temperatures will last longer than those exposed to temperature fluctuations. Fresh beef and lamb have a longer shelf life than pork. It’s always good to use your eyes and nose to judge for yourself. If you smell a really strong off-flavor and the meat looks brown or green in spots, that’s a good sign it’s past its prime.

WHAT IS THE RED LIQUID INSIDE MY PACKAGE OF MEAT?

Most people assume that the red liquid is blood. In fact, it is a mixture of water and myoglobin, a protein in muscle responsible for giving meat its red color. As the meat ages, muscle fibers break down (and become more tender) and myoglobin and water cells are released. In the industry, this liquid is often referred to as “purge.” Blood is actually eliminated when an animal is slaughtered.

SOMETIMES I SMELL AN ODOR WHEN I OPEN MY PACKAGE. DOES THAT MEAN THE MEAT IS BAD?

No. Chances are that odor comes from the natural aging process when meat is stored under refrigerated conditions. Enzymes activate the aging (and tenderizing) process and lead to off-gassing. Inside a vacuum seal bag under pressure, gases build up. When you first open the bag and release the seal, the odor may be pungent but should dissipate quickly once you rinse it.

HOW LONG CAN I KEEP MY MEAT IN THE FREEZER?

You can keep our meats in your freezer up to six months or longer. Make sure the vacuum seal stays intact. Remember, it is best to freeze your meat immediately after purchasing it if you don't plan to consume it right way. Freezing "halts" the spoilage process but doesn't reverse it. If you keep the meat in your refrigerator for 10 days and then put it in the freezer, when you remove it, you will need to cook it right away as the shelf life will be minimal. If the vacuum seal breaks, you will likely notice signs of freezer burn or white dried patches on the meat. It is technically safe to eat but will be dried out and tasteless as a result.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY MEAT HAS GONE BAD?

Typical signs of spoiled meat include a slimy residue, tacky texture, strong and persistent odor, and/or off color. It is worth noting that a change in color alone does not necessarily indicate spoilage. Many factors influence the color of meat, including the age, species, sex and diet of the animal, the specific cut of meat and how the meat is stored. Changes in color are normal during storage.

FOR A GOOD DISCUSSION OF FOOD SAFETY ISSUES, PLEASE VISIT USDA'S FOOD SAFETY INSPECTION SERVICE AT:

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling>