

# FAQ



## ALL ABOUT OUR SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

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Our specialty products include a variety of fresh and smoked sausages, city hams, smoked bacon, ham hocks and pork neck bones, Canadian bacon, leaf lard and hard-cured salami. Here's the scoop on their ingredients and how they are made.

### HOW IS YOUR SAUSAGE MADE?

Our sausages are made for us at two USDA-inspected meat processing plants. Never fear, they are made with wholesome authentic ingredients that you will recognize. We make our sausages fresh every week from whole muscle cuts, including fresh hams, shank meat, picnic shoulders and, of course, trim. Trim is smaller pieces of meat and fat that are cut away from whole muscles and retail cuts during the fabrication process so they have a consistent “trimmed” or clean look. All of this meat is cut into small pieces and then put through a grinder to achieve the desired consistency and then mixed with salt and spices. For linked sausages, the ground mixture is stuffed into all-natural casings and then hand-tied into six inch links.

### DO YOUR SPECIALTY PRODUCTS CONTAIN REGULATED FOOD ADDITIVES?

No, our specialty products do not contain regulated additives. Technically, a food additive is any substance added to food that becomes a component of and/or affects the characteristics of that food. The salt, sugar and spices we add to our specialty products are in the broadest sense food additives. Salt, especially, enhances flavor and color and binds meat proteins to create a more consistent texture. But these simple ingredients are not regulated as food additives and are considered by the US Food & Drug Association to be “GRAS” or Generally Recognized as Safe. We list them as ingredients and make the claim “no additives.”

### DO YOU USE PRESERVATIVES IN YOUR SAUSAGES?

No. Preservatives are compounds that prevent food spoilage from bacteria, molds, fungi or yeast. Salt is perhaps the most common preservative used in meat products to prevent spoilage. Our sausages contain relatively small amounts of regular table salt to enhance flavor and to help bind meat proteins. Table salt is almost pure sodium chloride and when

used in our sausages is not considered a preservative. These products are also technically considered “nitrate-free.”

## **DO YOU USE PRESERVATIVES IN YOUR CURED PRODUCTS?**

Yes. We use salt as a preserving agent for our bacon and ham products. We do not make the claim that these products are free of preservatives because curing is intended (in combination with the smoking process) to add flavor, provide a pink (vs. gray) color to the meat, and help preserve and extend shelf life.

**“Natural”** - We make certain products with an “all-natural” preservative made from celery juice powder. These include our: City Hams (food service size) and Hickory Smoked Bacon (retail size).

**Conventional “Sodium Nitrite” Cure** - We make some products with a conventional cure containing sodium chloride and sodium nitrite. Conventionally cured products include: Petite City hams (retail size), Hickory Smoked Bacon (food service size), Canadian Bacon (both retail and food service size) and smoked hocks and pork neck bones.

**A Note About Sodium Nitrite** - *The choice to use different approaches to curing has been largely dictated by the needs and interests of our customers. Some prefer the natural cure and others the conventional. For many years we opted for the natural cure in all of our products. But in 2022, the cost for celery juice powder rose dramatically and prompted us to add products made with a conventional sodium nitrite cure. But the distinction between the two, from a health perspective, is perhaps overblown. Due to the basic rules of chemistry, products that include celery juice powder do end up containing naturally-occurring nitrate and its derivative, sodium nitrite. Consumers should bear this in mind when considering the meaning of the term “no nitrites” added.*

## **DO YOUR SPECIALTY PRODUCTS CONTAIN FILLERS?**

No, we do not use fillers such as wheat flour or cornstarch.

## **ARE YOUR PRODUCTS GLUTEN-FREE?**

Yes. All of our sausages are made from meat, salt and spices and do not contain gluten, including all forms of wheat. Our spice blends also do not contain gluten or wheat nor are our spice essential oils (extractives) derived using gluten or grains or grain by-products. All of our sausages are made in facilities that do not store known allergens.

## **WHAT KIND OF CASINGS DO YOU USE?**

Our pork sausages are hand-tied using an all-natural pork casing derived from hog intestines. Our country breakfast sausage “pinkie” links are mechanically tied. Our lamb sausages are hand-tied using an all-natural sheep casing derived from sheep intestines.

## **WHICH SPICES DO YOU USE?**

We use a variety of different spices, depending on the type of sausage. (See [here](#) for a list of ingredients in each sausage). To create our custom sausages, we develop the basic sausage recipe and ingredient list and then work with a wholesale spice manufacturer to refine the recipe and produce the blends for us.

## **WHAT ARE NATURAL SPICE EXTRACTIVES?**

Spice extractives are the essential oils or concentrated essence of a spice’s flavor compounds. Essential oils are used in small amounts to add the desired flavor without having to add larger quantities of the whole herb or spice, which can unfavorably influence a product’s texture. The only spice extractives we use are from various peppers (red, black and chili) and oregano. Spice extractives are derived using either steam or chemical processes. Essential oils are derived using steam. Oleoresins are derived using hexane, a chemical solvent that is then removed using steam and vacuum. As best we understand, these processes do not involve wheat, soy, grains or yeast or other food by-products that are considered allergens.

## **WHY IS THERE SUGAR IN SOME OF YOUR SAUSAGES?**

Most of our sausages contain a very small amount of sugar. It turns out that a small amount of sugar is a pretty critical ingredient in sausage. It binds with the meat proteins in a way that induces browning and serves as a flavor enhancer to balance the salt. Sugar is typically the second to last ingredient in our spice mix. In other words, there is not as much sugar (by weight) as our spices. For example, each pound of Firsthand Foods’ country breakfast sausage contains two tenths of an ounce of salt, two-tenths of an ounce of spices, and one-tenth of an ounce of sugar. So, it’s a really small amount but just enough, in our opinion, to help sausage be sausage. We understand and appreciate that our customers are concerned about hidden sugars in processed foods. If you still want to refrain from any and all sugar, please try our chorizo sausage and our lamb sausage (merguez) both of which do not contain any sugar. And, of course, our ground pork contains no sugar so you could also consider using it to get creative and make your own sausage!