

Foodservice operators are as concerned about serving *safe* food as they are about serving *great tasting* food. Because meat is a perishable product, it's not only potentially dangerous to handle carelessly, but expensive to waste. By observing the following tips, operators can serve their patrons consistent, high-quality beef time and time again.

**Remember:
Keep it Cold,
Keep it Clean,
Keep it Moving.**

Share these tips with your back-of-the-house crew and wait staff. Following these steps will help you avoid costly mistakes, and help ensure your patrons have an enjoyable meal. For more detailed information on cleaning, sanitizing and food safety in your operation, contact the Educational Foundation of the National Restaurant Association at (800) 765-2122, and ask about their "ServSafe" comprehensive serving safe food program.



BEEF STORAGE & HANDLING

ACCEPTING A SHIPMENT OF BEEF

- ▶ A close inspection of each shipment of beef will ensure that it arrives in good quality and meets purchasing specifications.
- ▶ **ACCEPTABLE Meat:**
For fresh beef (not in vacuum packaging)
 - ▶ Is bright cherry red.
 - ▶ Is firm and elastic to the touch.
 - ▶ Arrives at 41°F or below.
- ▶ **ACCEPTABLE Meat:**
For vacuum-packaged beef
 - ▶ Is dark red, even slightly purplish, in color.
 - ▶ Arrives with the vacuum sealed; any sign of leakage indicates the seal has been broken, and the meat is unacceptable.
 - ▶ May have an unusual odor; this is due to a lack of oxygen and is not a sign of spoilage. The odor disappears after vacuum-package is opened, 15 to 30 minutes.
- ▶ **UNACCEPTABLE Meat:**
 - ▶ Is brown or greenish; contains brown, green or purple blotches; or has black, white or green spots.
 - ▶ Has a slimy, sticky or dry texture.
 - ▶ Arrives in broken cartons, has dirty wrappers, or torn packaging.

KEEP IT COLD

- ▶ **STORING BEEF:**
 - ▶ Place meat in cooler or freezer immediately upon delivery.
 - ▶ For best quality and shelf life, store fresh beef at temperatures between 28°F and 32°F.
 - ▶ Store frozen beef at or below 0°F.
 - ▶ Fresh, unopened, vacuum-packaged meat usually has about 21 days of refrigerated storage life (ground beef, 14 days). Once the package is opened, storage life decreases to 2 to 3 days.
 - ▶ It's best to store meat alone in a cooler, as the product absorbs odors from other foods. However, if space does not allow, keep beef *below* ready-to-eat foods in refrigerated storage. This will prevent the raw product from dripping onto prepared foods and contaminating them.
 - ▶ For beef that is properly frozen, storage life can range anywhere from 6 months at 0°F to 12 months at -5°F.
- ▶ **DEFROSTING BEEF:**
 - ▶ Defrost foods in a cooler...*never* at room temperature.
 - ▶ Thaw frozen beef at refrigerator temperatures for 15 to 24 hours. Do not thaw meat at room temperature, on a counter top or in warm water.



KEEP IT CLEAN

Meat is basically sterile until it comes in contact with knives, grinders and other equipment. Therefore, anything beef comes into contact with should be kept clean and sanitized.

TO CLEAN involves physically removing particles and food matter from the surface of grinders, knives, cutting boards, slicers or other equipment used to prepare meat. Soil should be loosened and rinsed away using a cleaning agent under sufficient pressure (such as from a brush, scrubbing pad or water spray).

TO SANITIZE is to reduce the amount of micro-organisms, such as bacteria, to safe levels; sanitizing is one step beyond cleaning, and in the case of food-contact surfaces (grinders, knives, slicers, cutting boards, etc.), is a necessary step. Items to be sanitized must always be cleaned first.

There are two ways to sanitize: immersing the object in 171°F water for 30 seconds, which is hot enough to kill bacteria; or treat with a chemical sanitizing compound. Chemical sanitizers are widely accepted in the foodservice industry.

Wash hands thoroughly, immediately before and after handling raw meat.

Keep thermometers clean and sanitized.

Keep storage areas and counter surfaces clean and sanitized.

- ▶ Keep vehicles for transporting (such as carts and trays) clean to avoid cross-contaminating foods.
- ▶ Never use the same utensils or cutting boards for raw and cooked products.
- ▶ Keep raw and cooked products separate during preparation. Never place a cooked product on a surface where a raw product has been without first washing, rinsing and sanitizing area.

KEEP IT MOVING

- ▶ When storing the product, rotate the boxes so that “first in, first out” inventory method is applied.

GROUND BEEF:

- ▶ Cook bulk ground beef as soon after thawing as possible.
- ▶ Cook ground beef without interruption; partial cooking may encourage bacterial growth before cooking is complete.
- ▶ Cook fresh ground beef products within 2 to 3 days.



Ground beef is a highly perishable product. As beef is ground, the surface area of the meat is greatly increased. Any bacteria that are present on the outside of the meat prior to grinding will be distributed throughout the product as it is ground and blended. Therefore, care must be taken to prevent bacteria from multiplying.

A loss in wholesomeness and flavor characteristics of ground beef products can occur if proper handling, storage and cooking procedures are not used. Practicing the following recommendations helps to ensure that a safe ground beef product is served. Proper handling and storage procedures also save money by reducing the cost of product loss.

COOKING GROUND BEEF PATTIES

- ▶ Turn ground beef patties over at least once.
- ▶ To keep in juices, do not press patties with spatula.
- ▶ Determine the cooking time and temperatures for your type of equipment and type of ground beef products.
 - ▶ The time required to reach the desired degree of doneness varies with the type and temperature of the cooking equipment used; the size, shape and thickness of the beef patties; initial starting temperature of patties (fresh or frozen); and the quantity of patties cooking at one time. All cooking equipment should be tested and calibrated on a regular basis to ensure that it is producing the desired cooking temperatures.
- ▶ The National Cattlemen's Beef Association recommends cooking ground beef to an internal temperature of 160°F. Check with your local health department for recommended procedures. A clean and sanitized thermometer with a sensor tip should be used to test the end temperature of the product.

COOKING BULK GROUND BEEF

- ▶ Crumbled ground meats should be cooked to 160°F.
- ▶ Due to the nitrate content from onions, celery, peppers, etc., meat loaf often remains pink in the center even if a 160°F end temperature is reached. Therefore, be sure to verify the final internal temperature with a sanitized thermometer.
- ▶ Do not let cooked ground beef products stand at room temperature. After cooking, keep them hot at 140°F or higher while serving, or cool immediately.
- ▶ Cool cooked ground beef products as quickly as possible after cooking. Use shallow counter pans to help the cooking process.
- ▶ To reheat fully-cooked ground beef products, cover and heat to at least 160°F.
- ▶ To help cool foods quickly, divide larger containers of food into smaller containers or into shallow pans. Also, use ice water baths to bring food temperatures down quickly. When cooling, use the two-stage cooling method: cooked food must be cooled from 140°F to 70°F in 2 hours; and then from 70°F to 41°F in 4 hours, for a total cooling time of 6 hours.

