

Safe Thawing

(a guide to thawing, packaging and selling of defrosted poultry)

Introduction

Freezing is the process in which the temperature of a food is reduced below its freezing point and the majority of the water inside the food undergoes a change in state to form ice crystals. Freezing preserves food (e.g. poultry) for extended periods because it prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause both food spoilage and foodborne illness. Poultry stored constantly at -18°C is safe and can be kept for a long period of time.

2. Although freezing prevents microbial growth in foods, it will not destroy all microorganisms. As soon as any part of poultry begins to thaw, bacteria begin to multiply. The number of these bacteria will not reach dangerous levels within short periods of time if poultry have been safely thawed, transported and stored. On the other hand, improper thawing provides an opportunity for bacteria that may have been present before freezing to multiply to harmful numbers.

3. The purpose of this guide is to provide practical, comprehensive guidance to all those involved in thawing of frozen poultry, packaging, displaying and selling of defrosted poultry for human consumption. It reflects international best practice and contains minimum requirements of thawing and handling defrosted poultry for safeguarding public health and assuring food safety. Businesses seeking other ways or practices to thaw and handle frozen poultry should conduct a proper scientific assessment to ensure that the defrosted product does not result in any risk to health.

Food Establishment

4. The design and facilities of food premises should be in compliance with the licensing requirements and conditions set forth by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

5. All frozen and refrigerated spaces should be fitted with equipment for the accurate monitoring of storage temperature.

6. Food premises should develop and implement a programme for cleaning and pest control.

Purchasing and Receiving

7. Raw frozen poultry should only be obtained from reputable and approved source.

8. Records showing the dates, quantities and sources of supply of frozen poultry should be maintained and held in a manner that will permit ready reference.

9. Raw frozen poultry received at a food premise should be inspected before acceptance.

10. Personnel responsible for inspection should as far as practically possible:

- satisfy that there are no signs or indications of contamination or damage to the raw poultry;
- satisfy that frozen poultry have arrived at proper temperature and free from observable evidence of temperature abuse; and
- move acceptable items quickly into storage.

Storage

11. Frozen poultry should be stored at -18°C or below.

Thawing and packaging

12. Thawing of frozen poultry should be done in a cold room or a refrigerator at a temperature not exceeding 8°C and stacked in a manner that allows good air circulation and easy handling.

13. Thawing procedures should be well planned to minimize the time thawed poultry is in the temperature danger zone (i.e. between 4 and 63°C) and

to prevent cross-contamination.

14. Frozen poultry should be kept away from other foods in a cold room or placed on the bottom shelf of a refrigerator to prevent cross-contamination.

15. Thawing poultry should be placed in clean and covered containers to prevent dripping and spilling onto other foods or food-contact surfaces.

16. The cold room or refrigerator should be fitted with equipment for the accurate monitoring of thawing temperature.

17. Thawed poultry should not be allowed to stand in operational areas other than for the short period of time necessary for packaging.

18. Packaging design and materials should provide adequate protection for products to minimize contamination, prevent damage, and accommodate proper labeling. Packaging materials where used must be non-toxic and not pose a threat to the safety and suitability of food under the specified conditions of storage and use.

19. Thawed and packaged poultry should be clearly labeled in accordance with Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132, sub. Leg. W). To avoid consumers being misled by the treatment involved, the Regulations require that, inter alia, the name of the food on the label shall include or be accompanied by an indication to the effect that the poultry has been previously frozen.

20. Packaged poultry should be transferred as quickly as possible to a refrigerator at a temperature not exceeding 4°C.

Transport

21. At all stages of distribution, packaged poultry should be transported as soon and as quickly as possible and maintained as far as practically possible at a temperature not exceeding 4°C.

22. Packaged poultry should always be transported carefully to avoid contamination. When packaged poultry are transported with other goods, care

should be taken to ensure cross-contamination cannot occur.

23. Vehicles should be soundly constructed, well maintained and kept clean. They should be designed in such a way so as to ensure that the temperature remains constant and does not exceed 4°C.

Storage and Display

24. Packaged poultry should be stored and displayed under ventilated conditions at a temperature not exceeding 4°C.

Training

25. All staff involved in handling frozen/thawed poultry at any stage in the thawing, packaging, transporting and displaying poultry should be instructed and/or trained in food hygiene matters commensurate with their work activities.