

The Turkey Times

Annual
recipe issue

Volume XX, Issue 4 — Summer 2010

Published by The Turkey Farm, New Sharon, Maine

The many unseen (and some seen) steps to food safety

By Bob Neal

With a new administration in Washington and new oil all over the Gulf of Mexico, interest in government regulation is greater these days.

Some of that heightened interest is in food safety.

As we predicted in *The Turkey Times* (Spring 2009), new regulations are on the way from Washington in the area of food handling, and some of the proposals, as usual, will come down hardest on small producers such as ourselves.

And yet, we believe that you are more likely to find safely handled food when you buy from small producers who cannot afford to lose customers and who are human beings, not faceless corporations, to their customers.

You have probably noted that at market or at our farmstore we seem always to take a little extra time finishing a sale. This is for a reason, and the reason is food safety.

We store the 40 or so meat items in picnic chests with gel packs (for frozen items) or ice (for unfrozen).

We take them to market in a refrigerated truck.

At market, we do everything we can to prevent contamination.

That is why we bag all orders. Uncooked meat should not touch foods you might eat without cooking, such as lettuce or bread.

If the meat is frozen, we use a paper bag, and we urge you to recycle the bag and then use it to start a fire in the woodstove.

If the meat isn't frozen, we pack it in a plastic bag with ice. That keeps the meat cold and also prevents condensation from getting through a paper bag to touch food you'll eat without cooking.

We hate to use the plastic bags because the oil from which they are made is irreplaceable. But we would hate even more

The summer screed

Note: To discuss food safety properly, this article must include some details of slaughtering and processing. You may want to carefully select when to read it.

for your family to get sick because we hadn't properly handled your food.

And, to help the environment, we use large T-strap bags that are made of biodegradable plastic. Use the bag until it



shreds, then throw it away wet. In time, it will compost like a paper bag.

These bags cost more than twice what we pay for regular bags, but we are willing to pay extra to protect your food and the environment.

We carry this finickiness over to cooking samples at market. We use one set of tongs, for example, to put uncooked meat onto the grill, another set to take it

off. This breaks any possible cycle of contamination that would be perpetuated by using one set of tongs for both raw and cooked meat. All samples we offer are one-time servings, either in a deli cup or on a toothpick or cracker.

We clean and disinfect the serving board several times during each market.

We may slow you down a bit while you shop, but please remember that we are working to keep your food safe.

And the work of keeping your food safe begins long before we get to market. It begins on our ranges and in our processing plant.

Turkey *meat* by nature is not potentially hazardous. No harmful bacteria grow in the meat, but only in the colon, while the bird is alive. The problems begin minutes after slaughter.

To put it delicately, contamination comes primarily from partly digested material that can get onto the Turkey's skin during processing.

Keeping the carcass free of contamination is job one during processing. Getting and keeping it cold is a very close second.

Temperature is crucial because should any contamination get onto the carcass, salmonella and other bacteria multiply rapidly at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

Most small Turkey growers work hard to avoid such contamination.

And, an academic study a few years ago, published in *Poultry USA*, reported that the technology least likely to result in contaminated skin or meat is that developed in the 1950s and widely used in the '60s.

Guess when our equipment was built.

We scald every carcass in 142-degree water to loosen the feathers. Then in a large drum, we spin the carcass, and rubber fingers on the sides and bottom

(Continued on page 2)

Food safety on the farm and in the plant is a daily concern

(Continued from Page 1)

of the drum pull out the loosened feathers. Then, we hang the carcass on a shackle for evisceration, hand feather-picking and cleaning.

Without being too graphic, I can say that fecal matter can escape during those stages: in the scalding water, in the spinning drum and in the evisceration.

While the carcasses spin in the feather-picking drum, we constantly spray them with warm water to wash off any possible contamination.

And, during evisceration, my standing order to the crew is to stop the line and immediately wash off any potentially contaminating matter.

In large plants, the carcasses are dipped in a chlorine bath, routinely, and again if they fall onto the floor or are visibly contaminated. Chlorine is toxic, so we avoid it except where the state forces us to use it, as in sanitizing washed and rinsed dishes. Some countries, such as Brazil, won't import poultry that has been bathed in chlorine.

After evisceration, we remove the oil sack, neck and excess neck skin. And wash the carcass again. Then we plunge it into a tank full of ice and water, usually within 15 minutes of death. We must get the carcass temperature down to 40 degrees from 105 within eight hours. Our records show that we almost always

The summer screed

get to 40 degrees in four hours or less.

If bacterial contamination got onto the bird, it would multiply quite rapidly at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees, so we really push the process to get them into the icy water.

We years ago adopted the HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) plan of Misty Knoll Farm in New Haven, Vt., a federally approved plan.

As in all matters, there are many differences between small and large plants. I visited a medium-sized (by national standards) slaughterhouse about a decade ago, where 1,100 Turkeys are slaughtered each morning, in less than four hours.

We slaughter about 50 birds an hour.

In the larger plants, the scalding water isn't changed all at once but through a continuous flow. We change the water in our scald every 100 or so birds. If the birds have been standing in mud, we change the water more often.

Changing the water takes about 45 minutes, and with a crew of 10 that means 7.5 hours of paid unproductive time.

But we do it to keep the water as clean as possible. When I asked two state inspectors in 1994 to recommend how often to change the water, I got three answers that weren't even close to one another. We

stayed with 100.

After we plunge the carcass into the icy water of the chill tank, we take the temperatures of several carcasses in each tank every hour or two. Although experience tells us when to add ice, the thermometer confirms whether the carcasses are cooling fast enough. If not, we add ice. We record the time at which carcasses became cold enough to begin packaging.

I have visited slaughter lines in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and New York. On those farms, I have learned that we use about twice more ice per bird than most farms.

We make a quarter ton of ice every day and store it in our walkin freezer. To slaughter 100 birds of 20 pounds each, we use well more than a ton of ice.

At Thanksgiving, we truck ice from Vessel Services Inc., in Portland, to augment our farm-made stash. Last Thanksgiving, we used about 13 tons of ice to slaughter 1,600 birds.

As we cut up or bag chilled birds, temperature and cleanliness remain key concerns. We handle the meat in small amounts (10 to 60 pounds) so it is out of the walkin cooler for the shortest time possible. I know when employees complain about cold hands that they are handling meat that we have kept safely cold.

We want to hear them complain often.

Food safety at home: Common sense and a little more

Food safety is mostly common sense.

Keep it clean, keep it cold. After cooking, keep it hot. And, cook it properly.

Fortunately, virtually all illness that can be borne by Turkey can be avoided by proper cooking. Cook white meat to 160 to 165 degrees. Cook dark meat to 180 degrees. Use a meat thermometer. Most harmful bacteria die at 160 degrees.

With lower fat Turkey, such as ours, it is important not to overcook because the Turkey can dry out quickly after it is cooked.

When a recipe calls for marinating Turkey, do so in a bowl in the fridge. When a recipe tells you to set aside cooked meat, set it aside in the fridge if it is to be away from heat for more than half an hour.



Some recipes may call for par-cooking (partly cooking) Turkey. Don't do it. Cook it all at once and reheat it if necessary. Put away any uneaten cooked Turkey within half an hour of cooking.

If you're cutting up uncooked Turkey, clean the knife and utensils right after finishing with them. Clean any surfaces that the Turkey was on.

Cleaning means warm, soapy water and rinsing. In our plant, we dip all food-contact items in a solution of 50 ppm bleach, which is about half a bleach-bottle cap to a gallon of water.

Then, we let the washed items air dry.

Clean rags that you use to wipe surfaces on which you cut meat. Or, as we do in our plant, use paper

towels so you can throw them away after one use.

Recipes

Our annual recipe issue features five recipes, all of them for sausages that we make. Note that sausages can frequently be substituted. If you want, for example, a sausage hotter than Italian for the stuffed zucchini, use andouille or chorizo. A chart of sausage sweetness and spiciness is on page 5.

Stuffed zucchini

When the garden overflows with zucchini and your neighbors avoid eye contact because they're afraid you've come to offer them your surplus zucchini, use up the zukes with this recipe.

2 small to medium zucchini
 2 Tbsp. olive oil
 2 lbs. Italian sausage, casing removed
 1/4 cup onion, chopped finely
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1/4 lb. mushrooms, fresh
 1 can tomato paste (6 oz.)
 1/4 cup Romano cheese, grated
 2 Tbsp fresh parley, or 2 tsp. dried parsley
 1/4 cup dry white wine
 Black pepper
 kosher or coarse salt
 2 Tbsp. parmesan cheese, grated
 olive oil

In a large pot, bring to the boil enough water to cover the zucchini. Add the zucchini to the pot and cook for 10 minutes. Remove the zucchini, pat dry and set aside.

In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and sauté, crumbling it with the back of a spoon, until it is cooked through and browned, about 10 minutes. Add the onion, garlic and mushrooms and sauté for 56 minute more. Drain off the fat and remove skillet from heat.

Slice each zucchini in half lengthwise. Scoop out the flesh with a spoon, without puncturing the skin. Chop the removed flesh and add it to the sausage mixture.

Add the tomato paste, cheese, parsley, wine and pepper and salt to taste. Cook over medium heat for 5 minutes

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Grease a baking sheet and place the zucchini halves on the sheet. Divide the sausage mixture among the halves. Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese evenly on top and dribble a little olive oil onto each.

Base, uncovered, for 30 minutes, until the zucchini is tender. Serve at once.

—From *Home Sausage Making*,
 By Susan Mahnke Peery & Charles G. Reavis

Peachy, punchy Turkey sausage links

1/2 cup peach preserves (substitutes: apricot, plum, pear)
 1/4 cup Dijon mustard
 1/2 tsp. Hot sauce, such as Tabasco
 2 tsp. Rosemary
 2 tsp. Thyme
 1 Tbsp. Olive oil
 3/4 lb. Turkey breakfast links, garlic lover's sausage, Italian sausage, summer sausage or other links

Sauce: In a medium saucepan, whisk preserves over medium heat until melted and smooth, about a minute. Add mustard and whisk until sauce begins to simmer, also about a minute. Remove from heat and stir in rosemary, thyme and hot sauce. Salt and pepper to taste.

Sausage: Add a tablespoon of olive oil to a large skillet over medium heat and sauté sausage links until brown and cooked through, about 10 minutes. Put links into saucepan with the sauce over medium heat. Stir until sausages glaze, about a minute. Serve on a platter.

— From *Zorba Paster on Your Health*
 Wisconsin Public Radio

Sausage tortellini soup

1 Tbsp olive oil
 1 lb. Italian Turkey sausage, sliced into 1/2-inch chunks
 2 small zucchini, chopped
 2 carrots, chopped
 1 onion, chopped
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1 can tomatoes, peeled, whole, in juice (28 oz.)
 4 cups broth (Turkey or vegetable)
 2 cups water
 1 lb. cheese tortellini, fresh
 10 oz. spinach, chopped
 2 tsp. basil, dried
 1 tsp. oregano, dried
 kosher or coarse salt to taste
 Grated parmesan or asiago cheese

In a large soup pot over medium-high heat, heat the oil. Saute the sausage until browned and cooked through, about 10 minutes. Add the zucchini, carrots, onion and garlic and sauté until the vegetables start to soften, about 10 minutes, stirring and turning the vegetables.

Add tomatoes, broth and water and bring the mixture to a simmer. Cook for about 30 minutes, until the vegetables are tender.

Add the tortellini and simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in the spinach, basil, oregano and cayenne and simmer for 5 minutes longer. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve in bowls with the cheese sprinkled over the top.

—From *Home Sausage Making*,
 By Susan Mahnke Peery & Charles G. Reavis

Holiday ordering is just around the corner Year-round customers order starting Aug. 1

We weren't quite to June when the first customer at farmers market asked if she could reserve a Thanksgiving Turkey.

That wasn't the earliest request ever, but it was close. The answer was no, but soon, the answer will be yes. On Aug. 1, we will start taking orders from our year-round customers for farm-fresh Turkeys for Thanksgiving and for Christmas.

Those are the people who buy CSA shares or visit our stand regularly at the Crystal Spring Farmers Market in Brunswick or our farmstore in New Sharon.

We will open the ordering process for holiday-only customers after Labor Day.

The process will closely resemble the

process of the past few years. You order. We confirm the order and prepare a Turkey for you. You pick up and enjoy the Turkey.

We will again be open at our farmstore from Sunday through Wednesday of Thanksgiving week, with both early and late pickups possible. For Christmas, the farmstore will be open on Dec. 22 and 23.

We plan also to have the annual pickups at Brunswick on Wednesday, Nov. 24, and on Thursday, Dec. 23. Both will be at the Crystal Spring Farm. The Orono pickups will be on Nov. 22 and Dec. 22.

We are also looking for other places to have pickups. Portland is a strong contender. We are also considering a pickup

in Waterville or Augusta and are interested in finding a pickup in the mid-coast area between Rockland and Belfast. Please pass along suggestions for pickup sites.

We'll have full details, including price, in The Turkey Times autumn issue.

It is possible that we can lower the price for the second consecutive year because our feed price has fallen.

Last year, whole Turkeys dropped to \$2.95 a pound from \$3.09 in 2008.

We'll also have an order form in the fall issue, and we will update the order form on our website, theturkeyfarm.com, in plenty of time to order for Thanksgiving and/or Christmas.

You can keep the CSA light bright at our farm

Like the splash of brightness against the somber background of an Andrew Wyeth painting, participation in Community Supported Agriculture at our farm has stood out in a bleak economy.

This season, though, the brightness is fading a bit. As of July 5, 77 sharers had bought 86 shares, investing a total of \$14,050 in Community Supported Agriculture at our farm.

Last year, more than 100 sharers invested \$21,250 in our CSA program.

If all those whose shares will run out in the next six months were to renew at the same level, we would be short five sharers and more than \$1,300 from the amount invested in 2009.

There is always some dropoff of sharers, so we need to attract new sharers.

Here is the deal we offer both new and renewing sharers.

You invest in our Turkey production before we bring in the harvest, and we guarantee the amount of your investment (plus interest) in Turkey products from our flocks. You draw against that credit anytime you want until the investment and interest are used up.

You get the best animal protein available, and you get it when you want it. You get the satisfaction of helping keep Maine's fragile farm economy upright.

You also get influence with the farm. Over the years, we have put into action any number of suggestions from sharers, from products and ingredients to avoiding genetically modified grains in feed.

You also get a changing variety of Turkey items from which to make your meals. We have a standing array of about 35 items, and each season we add a few, such as potato sausages in spring and fruit sausages in autumn, etc.

CSA works for us because we get money up front, when we need it most to invest in baby Turkeys, feed and maintenance and our income is limited to the proceeds from the farmers market. We

also draw great comfort from knowing that more than 100 customers have the confidence in our methods and products to invest their money in the farm.

Some choose to invest their time, instead, by working for a share. For two days' work for the farm, they receive \$162 in Turkey, which they can draw just as paid sharers draw their proceeds.

The next workdays are Aug. 18-19, for a building project, and Sept. 22 and 23, to help get ready for the Fryeburg Fair.

To invest with money or work, fill in and send to us the form below. Your share begins when we get your check or when you have completed a day of work.

CSA Order Form 204

Fill out and send to The Turkey Farm, 219 Mile Hill Road, New Sharon, Maine 4955:

Please sign me up for the following share in Community Supported Agriculture:

(circle) \$100 \$150 \$200 \$250 \$300

Please sign me up for a work day(s) on (circle) Aug. 18 or 19 or Sept. 22 or 23

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

More recipes

Sausage stuffed mushrooms

This recipe is easier than it looks, and the stuffed mushrooms can do double duty as hors d'oeuvres or main course.

- 18 large mushroom caps
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 1/4 lb. Italian or other Turkey sausage, casing removed
- 2 Tbsp. onion, minced
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/4 cup breadcrumbs, dried
- 1/2 tsp. oregano, dried
- 2 Tbsp. dry sherry (optional)
- 1 Tbsp. fresh parsley, or 1 tsp. dried parsley
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 lb. mozzarella, grated

Clean the mushrooms and remove stems. Chop the stems finely and set aside. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat, add the mushroom caps and gently sauté for 2 to 3 minutes until they are slightly golden. Remove caps with a slotted spoon and drain on a paper towel.

Add the sausage and onions to the skillet and sauté, crumbling the sausage with the back of a spoon, until it is cooked through and lightly browned and the onions are crisp-tender, about 10 minutes. Stir the oil and chopped mushroom stems into the mixture in the skillet and sauté 2 minutes longer.

Remove skillet from the heat. Add the breadcrumbs, oregano, pepper and salt to taste, and sherry. Mix well.

Preheat the broiler. Grease a baking sheet. Stir the cheese into the sausage mixture and divide the mixture evenly among the mushroom caps. Arrange the caps on the baking sheet, filling-side up.

Broil for 1 to 2 minutes, until cheese bubbles. Serve hot.

Serves 6 to 8.

—From *Home Sausage Making*,
by Susan Mahnke Peery & Charles G. Reavis

Andouille with red beans and rice

This hearty meal usually has plenty of leftovers. If you like it milder, use our smoked kielbasa and eliminate Tabasco sauce.

- 1lb. smoked Turkey andouille, already cooked
- 1 lb. red kidney beans, dried
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 stalk celery, finely chopped
- 1 cup green pepper, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tsp. thyme, dried
- 1 tsp. oregano, dried
- 3 bay leaves, crushed
- 1 tsp. black pepper, ground
- 1 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1/2 tsp. Tabasco sauce (optional)
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- Steamed rice cooked separately

Wash the beans and put them into a 3-quart pot nearly filled with water. Let sit overnight. Or, bring pot to a boil, turn off heat and let sit for an hour. Save beans and stock.

In a 3-quart saucepan over high heat, swirl the olive oil to cover the bottom. Add the onions, celery, green pepper, garlic, thyme, oregano, bay leaves and black pepper. Stir frequently so the veggies cook evenly. The mixture should be very aromatic.

As the veggies start softening, stir in the beans, mixed with the tomato paste and 8 cups of stock from the bean pot (or water or tomato juice). Bring to a boil, then turn heat to low and simmer the mixture for an hour, stirring occasionally.

After the beans have simmered for an hour, check. If they hold shape and are soft to the tooth, they are done. Salt and pepper to taste. To cream the veggies New Orleans style, take a half cup of beans from the pot and mash them in a dish, then stir them back into the pot to simmer a bit more.

Cut the andouille into chunks. Place in a frying pan on low heat in a tablespoon of olive oil. Warm the andouille.

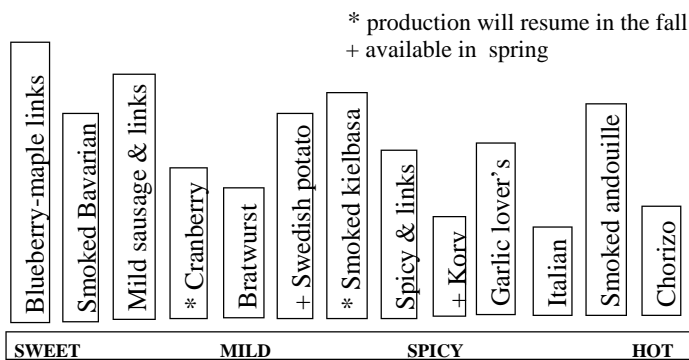
Add andouille to the beans and simmer for about 15 minutes.

Serve the andouille-beans mixture over the rice. Sprinkle Tabasco sauce over top for added spice.

—Contributed by John McKee, Brunswick

A SAUSAGE HEAT PRIMER

On a scale of sweet-to-hot, our sausages rank this way:



COOKING WITH OUR TURKEY SAUSAGE

Almost all of our sausages can be used in place of a sausage of the same or similar name made with another meat. For example, our breakfast links compare in taste to pork breakfast links.

There are differences, though.

For one, our sausages are far less fatty than those made with pork, beef or chicken. So, you will get a greater yield because there is so much less fat to cook out.

For another, ours never contain nitrates or nitrites. We freeze them instead of using chemical preservatives, and freezing can dry them and can reduce the flavor of the spices if you leave them too long frozen. Cook them as soon as you can.

On the health front — better

Customers have met the news of my having suffered a heart attack with an outpouring of concern. I am greatly comforted.

Of all the genetic preconditions I had to be concerned about (arthritis, diabetes, insanity), cardiac health was not even on the screen. It is now.

I follow doctors' orders closely. My cholesterol is shamefully low, mostly as a result of medications. I work out three days a week at Western Maine Personal Training, a quarter mile from the farm, and have lost nine pounds since resuming workouts in March.

Most important, I feel good most of the time. I still tire easily, and the docs say that will continue for as long as a year. Sometimes I just can't stand on the concrete floor any longer and have to sit down. I tell the crew I'm off to do "boss things," and I slink into the chair at my desk for a few minutes.

Making me feel even better was the news, arrived on our older son's birthday, that the ovarian cancer my wife, Marilyn, has been fighting for three years is in remission. Nothing else could have made me feel better.

A big part of feeling good these days is the wishes we have received from customers. One sent a Jacquie Lawson card, and those are always a joy. Several sent get-well cards through the post, others sent e-mail best wishes. Three have stopped by the farm, and none of them lives near.

At market, the question "How ya doin'" has taken on deeper meaning. While we get our living from selling what we produce, we get a great deal more from the people who visit us at market. The comfort spreads far beyond the cashbox.

As always, thank you.

—Bob Neal

Farmers market report: Not bad, and it may get better

Since a heart attack on Feb. 7 prompted us to reduce our marketing efforts, we have depended for income entirely on farmers markets, our farmstore and Community Supported Agriculture.

So far — here is where we rap on wood or cross our fingers — it's going fairly well. While the Crystal Spring Farmers Market in Brunswick is running behind last year, we see hopeful signs of a revival in the market. We are selling a comparable number of items to the past two years, although the dollar value of those items is down a bit because people buy ground Turkey instead of cutlets, loose sausage instead of links. Sales on July 3 were the highest since Sept. 26 last year.

Our farmstore started very slow — January and February are often terrible sales months at the farm — but since then monthly totals have surpassed last year. Overall, we are up about 15 percent for 2010.

Later in the season, we have the Fryeburg Fair and the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays to swell our bottom line. Or, more accurately, to pay off our line of credit at the Androscoggin Bank and pocket what's left.

For now, though, we are hopeful. Our peak year at Brunswick was 2007, and each year since has been down from the year before. The same is true of Fryeburg, but our best Thanksgiving was 2008.

We were emboldened by this year's early results to join a new Saturday farmers market in Farmington, our shiretown. We undertook a four-week trial there, but the results were terribly disappointing. We have suspended the Farmington operation until at least this autumn. If the market appears stronger by then, we will resume selling there.

In the meantime, we are at Crystal Spring, which is about as lovely a setting as you could ask for a farmers market, every Saturday, save Oct. 2 and Oct. 9, when we are at Fryeburg.

On Nov. 6, we head indoors to the Fort Andross winter market in Brunswick and, as well, to the new Midcoast Winter Market at the Topsham Grange. Both markets are held every Saturday through April, and we plan to staff both. We are one of only two farms participating in both markets.

See you at the market(s).

The Turkey Farm
219 Mile Hill Road
New Sharon, Maine 04955
turkeyfarm@gwi.net
theturkeyfarm.com
778-2889

please forward