

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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“Preparing the Thanksgiving Meal Safely”

Nobody wants the gift of foodborne illness during the holidays. Much our Thanksgiving food safety choices begins with the decision of buying a fresh or frozen turkey. If you choose fresh, be sure to place an order with your grocer or butcher shop and pick it up 1-2 days before the meal. Once you get it home, store it in the refrigerator. Frozen turkeys can be purchased any time and stored in the freezer.

Frozen turkeys are best thawed in the refrigerator or in cold water. In the fridge, plan on at least 5-7 days for a 20-pound turkey to thaw. In cold water, allow about 30 minutes per pound of turkey. Make sure your fridge temperature is set between 35-38 F.

When you go to cook your turkey, remember that 325 F is the lowest oven temperature to safely cook turkey. Use a food thermometer to be sure it reaches a minimum internal temperature of 165 F. If you only have one oven, use a slow cooker for hot dishes. A tabletop roaster oven can be used like a regular oven for many items. Even electric pressure cookers can prepare dishes safely.

Are cooking needing two turkeys and want to cook them both at the same time? When doing so, make sure there is enough oven space for proper heat circulation. The cooking time is determined by the weight of one bird, and not the combined weight. Use the weight of the smaller bird to determine cooking time. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the smaller bird first and then check the second bird. The internal temperature should be a minimum of 165 F. Be sure to temp the parts of the turkey that will take the longest to cook; the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

Information comes from K-State University food safety specialist and coordinator of the Rapid Response Center, Karen Blakeslee.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.