

News for Immediate Release

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Agriculture Secretary Reminds Residents to Take Food Safety Precautions during Flooding, Power Outages

Harrisburg – Agriculture Secretary George Greig today encouraged farmers and residents affected by flooding or power outages to take precautionary food safety measures.

“Simple steps like monitoring the temperature and condition of food can make the difference between safe food and dangerous food,” said Greig. “I encourage Pennsylvanians to follow basic food safety tips to ensure they remain safe.”

Greig offered the following tips to help families minimize the potential for food-borne illness due to power outages or flooding:

During flooding:

- Drink only bottled water if flooding has occurred. Follow any boil-water advisories if issued by your local municipalities.
- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils that come in contact with flood water with hot soapy water and sanitize by boiling these items in clean water, or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water.
- Products are safe to use if they have not come in contact with flood water.

If items have been submerged in floodwaters, discard:

- Foods that have been canned at home.
- All foods in cardboard boxes, paper, foil, cellophane or cloth.
- Meat, poultry, eggs or fish.
- Spices, seasonings, extracts, flour, sugar, grain, coffee, and other staples in canisters.
- Unopened jars with waxed cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing. Also, throw away preserves sealed with paraffin.
- Discard fruits and vegetables that have not been harvested from gardens and have been submerged in flood waters.
- Wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.

If items have been submerged in floodwaters, save:

- Commercially canned foods that came into contact with flood water and have been properly cleaned by: labeling cans with the name of food in permanent marker; removing labels; washing cans in water containing detergent; soaking cans for at least

- one minute in chlorine solution; rinsing in clean, cool water; placing on sides to dry (do not stack cans).
- Dishes and glassware if they are sanitized by boiling in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water.
 - When in doubt, throw it out.

During power outages:

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain cold temperatures. Each time a door is opened, temperatures rise significantly.
- An unopened refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about four hours. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full and the door remains closed).
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40 degrees or below.
- Never taste food to determine its safety.
- Use dry or block ice to keep refrigerators and freezers as cold as possible during prolonged power outages. Fifty pounds of dry ice should maintain an 18-cubic-foot, full freezer for two days.
- If the power has been out for several days, check the temperature of the freezer with an appliance thermometer or food thermometer. If the food still contains ice crystals or is at 40 degrees or below, the food is safe.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. If the food still contains ice crystals, the food is safe.
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items after four hours without power.

For more information about food safety, contact the Bureau of Food Safety and Laboratory Services at 717-787-4315 or visit www.agriculture.state.pa.us and search "food safety."