

Caribbean

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, over 3 million Caribbean-born people live in the U.S. They come from Jamaica, Barbados, Aruba, Antigua, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Grand Cayman, St. Maarten, St. Croix and other islands. Caribbean cuisine is a combination of African, Spanish and French cooking influences. These traditions were brought from the many homelands of the region's population. In addition, the Caribbean people have created a wealth of unique dishes based on native foods.

Cultural Do's and Don'ts

- In business situations, people of both genders usually shake hands when meeting and parting.
- Instead of a firm handshake, a soft, gentle handshake is the norm.
- Men often pat each other's arm or shoulder during the greeting process or while conversing.
- Wait until invited before using someone's first name.
- People from the Caribbean tend to stand closer than what you may be accustomed to in the U. S. Do not be offended.

Top 10 U.S. states with Caribbean immigrant populations

1. Florida	(1,105,079)
2. New York	(1,004,344)
3. New Jersey	(238,572)
4. Massachusetts	(112,116)
5. California	(70,135)
6. Connecticut	(52,716)
7. Maryland	(48,946)
8. Texas	(41,777)
9. Pennsylvania	(41,168)
10. Georgia	(39,100)

According to the 2000 U.S. Census

Caribbean - Ackee

Background

Ackee is the national fruit of Jamaica and is enjoyed as a prepared breakfast dish or as a lunch or dinner entrée. When the fruit turns ripe on the tree, it opens to reveal three large black shiny seeds surrounded by a bright yellow flesh. The yellow flesh around the seed is edible, but only after the fruit has opened naturally and has not yet become overripe.

Except for the yellow flesh surrounding the ackee seeds, the rest of the fruit contains toxic levels of hypoglycin A and B, which can cause mild to severe vomiting, convulsions, coma and even death in some cases. The yellow flesh itself is also toxic prior to ripening. Once the fruit is ripe and has opened, the levels of hypoglycin in the flesh rapidly diminish to non-detectable levels, making it safe for consumption.

Preparation Procedure

When traditionally prepared, the ackee is boiled, drained and simmered in oil with salted dried codfish, onions, peppers and spices. It is considered a delicacy by many, and has the look and consistency of scrambled eggs.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Food From Unsafe Sources

Ackee imports were banned in the U.S. for nearly 30 years before the FDA lifted the ban in 2000, after determining that safe processing methods had been developed by several companies. Imports of canned ackee are now allowed, but only from approved processing companies. It remains illegal to import fresh ackee. It is also illegal to sell or commercially serve ackee grown in the U.S.

In a number of cases, it has been discovered that unapproved companies are illegally exporting ackee into the U.S. by falsely labeling canned ackee as callaloo, breadfruit or ginger beer. Specific examples of false branding are canned ackee labeled as:

- Montego Brand Jamaican Callaloo in Brine
- Tropic Ginger Beer, Product of Jamaica
- Tropic Banana Fruit

Control Measures

- Confirm the source of the ackee by checking labels to be sure the canned ackee is from one of the processing companies approved by the FDA. For a current list of approved companies, go to <http://www/fda/gov> then click on the following: Freedom of Information>Index>Import Alerts>Search by Country>Jamaica.

- Periodically check FDA import alerts for any change in the import status of ackee.
- If there is product that is suspicious for misbranding, have the operator randomly open cans to confirm that the product label matches the contents of the can.

Caribbean - Bammy

Background

Bammy is a pancake shaped bread made with cassava flour. It may be eaten at any meal, and is commonly served with fried fish. Because it is very labor intensive, most restaurants or markets serving bammy purchase pre-processed cassava flour or the finished product from distributors. However, some establishments still make bammy from scratch, making the flour from fresh, grated cassava root, which poses a potential health risk.

Preparation Procedure

To prepare bammy from scratch, the cassava root is grated, dried and then ground into flour. The cassava flour is then mixed with water and salt to form a thick mixture. The mixture is formed into cakes and then grilled or deep fried. In some instances, the cooked bammy is lightly grilled, soaked in coconut milk and then re-grilled or fried until golden brown.

Regulatory Concern – Chemicals (Toxins)

The cassava root contains toxins that produce cyanide. If not properly processed, the cassava flour can be severely toxic. The process for making flour from cassava root is as follows:

1. Finely grate the cassava root
2. Press all of the liquid out of the pulp
3. Air or heat dry the pulp until it is completely dry
4. Sift into flour

Control Measures

- Ask the establishment how the bammy is prepared.
- For commercially processed bammy, confirm that it is from an approved source by checking packaging and invoices.
- If the establishment makes the bammy completely from scratch, ask them to describe the flour-making process from start to finish to ascertain that they are following the proper procedure listed above.

Caribbean – Boiled Bananas, Yams & Dumplings

Background

Boiled bananas, yams and flour dumplings are a common side dish in Caribbean restaurants. The yams, while similar in size and color to a potato, are nuttier in flavor and should not be confused with the Southern sweet yam or sweet potato. The trio is often served at breakfast but may also be served as side dishes at any meal.

Food Preparation Procedure

Green bananas and yams are simply boiled in water and served as is. Dumpling preparation is also very simple. The dough is made from flour, salt and water, shaped into flat ovals about 1” thick and 3” wide and boiled for about 25 minutes.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor– Improper Holding Temperatures

When bananas and yams are cooked, the chemical make-up changes, resulting in products that are potentially hazardous, meaning that they need time and temperature control for safety. Because the dumplings are a flour-based product, they too must be properly held to prevent microbial growth and toxin formation. In many Caribbean facilities, these products are often cooked and allowed to sit at room temperature, which poses a health risk.

Control Measures

- Verify that dumplings, yams and bananas are cooked and served immediately, hot held at 135°F or above or held for four hours or less, using time as a public health control with the proper documentation.

Caribbean - Beverages

Background

Many Caribbean food establishments carry a variety of traditional drinks. Among them are Irish moss, sorrell, ginger beer, coconut water and carrot juice. Some establishments may sell commercially produced drinks, but many proprietors prefer to make their own in-house.

Preparation Procedure

Irish Moss – A cold beverage made by mixing milk, lime juice, dried seaweed, sugar, gum arabic, isinglass (a gelatin made from dried fish bladders), linseed, spices that may include cinnamon, nutmeg, rosewater, vanilla and sometimes ginger. All of the ingredients except milk are boiled to a thick consistency. Then the milk (usually condensed) is added.

Sorrell – A cold beverage made with water, sorrell (a dried flower petal), ginger root and sugar. It is dark in appearance and is prepared by boiling water with ginger root, pouring it over the sorrell petals, allowing it to steep, and then adding sugar.

Ginger Beer – A cold beverage made by mixing boiling water, lime juice, ground ginger and sugar. It has a clear-like appearance with a light brown residue at the bottom.

Coconut Water – Liquid compressed from the meat of the nut; not to be confused with coconut milk or coconut cream.

Carrot Juice – A cold beverage made by mixing water, carrot juice and sometimes sugar.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Food From Unsafe Sources

These beverages pose no health risk if kept refrigerated. However, once a product is packaged and placed into a display cooler, it must be labeled according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standards. Many Caribbean food establishments that make the beverages in-house do not label them.

In addition, if the proprietor is using natural sorrel or natural Irish moss as a beverage ingredient, it must be confirmed that they are being obtained from a reputable source. Some establishments purchase these ingredients in bulk in packages with no labeling.

Additional Regulatory Concern - False Health Claims

Some establishments may have signage that advertises the beverages as providing certain health benefits such as energy boosting, immune system enhancement, virility inducing, etc. If claims are made that the drink can be used in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or prevention of disease in man or animals, it may fall under the definition of drug or health claims under the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should be contacted for verification.

Control Measures

- Check display coolers to make sure each beverage is labeled with the following information:

Name of beverage

Ingredients

Quantity

Nutritional information

Manufacturer's name and address (if made on the premises, the name and address of the manufacturer should be that of the restaurant or store)

- If beverages are prepared in-house using natural sorrell or Irish moss, check packaging or labeling to ascertain whether the ingredients are obtained from a reputable source. If they have purchased it in bulk with no labeling, verify where they purchased it through invoices or receipts. If there is concern that the vendor may not have obtained the products from a reputable source, consult the agency that has jurisdiction over the product.
- Check beverages and in-store signage to be sure unsubstantiated health claims are not being made.

Caribbean - Cassava

Background

Cassava is a tropical root vegetable, also known as manioc, yuca and yucca. It should not be confused with another plant called yucca, which has spiky leaves and is not eaten. The tuber is long, irregularly shaped, about 2-3 inches in diameter and 6-12 inches in length. Its white flesh is covered by a brownish layer which resembles bark. There are two main varieties – sweet cassava and bitter cassava.

In addition to wide use in the Caribbean and South America, the cassava is also used as a staple food in Africa and Asia and may be found on the menus of those types of restaurants.

Preparation Procedure

Sweet -- This variety is the most widely used in cooking. Like a potato, it can be boiled, baked or fried.

Bitter – The bitter variety is poisonous when raw and must undergo a purification process before it can be used. It is used mostly for making flour, tapioca and starch. The flour is called farofa and is bland much like corn meal and wheat flour. The flour can be mixed with water and the dough cooked on a large griddle to make large cassava flat breads. Gelatinized pellets of cassava are called tapioca, which is mixed with sugar and vanilla flavoring and used in desserts. The purified starch can be used as a thickening agent.

The proper process for making flour from bitter cassava root is as follows:

1. Finely grate the cassava root
2. Press all of the liquid out of the pulp
3. Air or heat-dry the pulp until it is completely dry
4. Sift into flour

Regulatory Concern – Preparation Methodology / Food From Unsafe Sources

Preparation Methodology

The bitter cassava root contains linamarin and lotaustralin, which are toxic glucosides that form cyanide. If not completely removed, these toxins can cause severe illness and even death.

Food From Unsafe Sources

Most establishments purchase cassava in a prepackaged, commercially produced form. It is important that if purchased prepackaged, it comes from an approved source that has properly removed the toxins.

Control Measures

- If a menu item lists cassava as an ingredient, ascertain the type of cassava used and verify that it is from an approved source.
- If bitter cassava is being utilized, verify the preparation methodology to ensure toxin removal.

Caribbean - Conch

Background

A conch is a large marine snail and has been a popular Caribbean staple for centuries. Its shell has a brightly colored pink lip, which can reach a length of 12 inches. Its taste is somewhat sweet and its flavor has been compared to that of clams.

Conch is served as an appetizer, in soups and stews, as a side dish and as a main course.

Preparation Procedure

Conch may be prepared in a variety of ways, including conch chowder, conch Creole, fried conch, conch fritters, in salads and grilled or boiled.

Regardless of the type of preparation, the meat must first be tenderized, as its tough connective tissue is very difficult to chew. The best way to do this is with a heavy meat mallet or a commercial meat tenderizer.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factors – Contamination / Cross Contamination

A significant number of restaurants use improper methods for tenderizing conch, such as using an ordinary steel claw hammer to pound the meat, thus putting it at risk for contamination. There have even been cases in which inspectors have observed workers taking the conch outside behind the restaurant and pounding it with a hammer with no sanitary precautions.

The proper way to tenderize conch is with a meat mallet or specially designed conch mallet on a restaurant-grade cutting board. Some restaurants use mechanical tenderizers such as those found in fish markets. In addition, powdered tenderizers similar to those used for other meats are now commercially available. Operators also have the option of buying conch already tenderized.

Control Measures

- Check to ascertain the method for tenderizing the conch.

If the establishment is using an improper method of tenderization, advise them on proper ways to do so.

Caribbean - Escovitch Fish

Background

In traditional Caribbean food establishments, escovitch fish is often prepared and left at room temperature for long periods of time. The practice most likely evolved because many food establishments in the Caribbean lacked electricity to hot hold or refrigerate food items. In native countries the dish may be left at room temperature for days or even weeks. It is believed that the inclusion of vinegar in its preparation prevents spoilage.

Preparation Procedure

Escovitch fish is a main course dish made with red snapper, onions, peppers, spices, oil and vinegar. Prior to preparation, the fish is generally kept frozen or placed in a refrigerated container of vinegar and ice. To begin preparation, the fish is washed in a fresh vinegar solution, then scaled, gutted and trimmed. It is then fried in hot oil until done. The other ingredients are sautéed in hot oil and vinegar. Once cooked, the mixture is poured over the fish and the dish is held until served.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Improper Holding Temperatures

Escovitch fish is typically held at room temperature after preparation. Although regulations require hot holding for this type of food, native proprietors are reluctant to do so. Patrons generally prefer to eat it at room temperature, and operators assert that hot holding can result in the dish becoming dry and tough.

In addition, because the dish is traditionally held at room temperature in Caribbean countries, proprietors don't understand why it is not allowed under U.S. regulations. Some contend that the vinegar added during the preparation of the fish preserves it. Because the dish is very popular, improper holding is an extremely common regulatory issue in facilities serving this product.

Control Measures

There are a number of options available to an operator to manage escovitch fish safely. Ensure that the facility handles the product in one of the following ways:

- Hot held at 135°F or above;
- Held for four hours or less using time as a public health control with the proper documentation; or

- Documentation that the preparation renders the product non-potentially hazardous because it results in the escovitch fish having a pH of 4.2 or below or a water activity (A_w) of .85 or below. A variance must be in place and the food product prepared under a HACCP plan.

Additional Considerations

Food establishments often take leftover escovitch fish and use it to prepare a dish called brown stew fish. If the original dish wasn't held at the proper temperature, the new dish may contain harmful pathogens or toxins. Therefore, if escovitch fish was not properly hot held or there is no documentation to verify that the fish is not potentially hazardous, it cannot be reused in the brown stew fish.

If previously hot held escovitch fish is reused for brown stew fish, it must be cooled from 135°F to 41°F within a total of six hours, provided that it is cooled from 135°F to 70°F within the first two hours.

Caribbean - Goat

Background

Goat is a common meat popular among many ethnicities, including African, Caribbean, Hispanic, Greek and Indian populations. Meat and Poultry inspection falls under the purview of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Through cooperative agreements, this responsibility may be transferred to States but any meat processed under State inspection is limited to intrastate commerce.

Preparation Procedure

Goat is prepared in a variety of ways, including roasted, braised and in soups and stews. Curried goat is among the most popular Caribbean dishes, brought to the islands when workers from India immigrated to the area after slavery was abolished.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Food From Unsafe Sources

While most goat meat is purchased from state or USDA approved plants, some restaurants and markets purchase goat meat from unapproved sources. Others may purchase a live goat from an unapproved source and process it themselves. Still others raise their own goats at home and slaughter and process them as needed. There have been cases in which inspectors have discovered whole animals, frozen with fur and hooves intact.

Any goat meat that is not from a USDA or state approved source is illegal and cannot be served in restaurants or sold in markets.

Control Measures

- If goat is on the menu or in a meat display case, ask to see the packaging or invoice in order to ascertain that it comes from an approved source.

Caribbean - Oxtails

Background

Oxtails are a traditional Caribbean food and are most often served as a stew. Oxtails are usually purchased in two forms: 1) the whole tail, which is several feet long, and 2) already cut into small portions. Most often, they come packaged in a box.

Preparation Procedure

Oxtail stew ingredients may vary, but usually include onions, garlic, tomatoes and spices. Sometimes bacon, beans and other vegetables are added. The dish is slow cooked and served with rice or other vegetable side dishes.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Improper Holding Temperatures

In facilities that have low or sporadic customer traffic, oxtails are frequently cooked and then held at room temperature. Once the dish is ordered, the product is reheated and served. Due to the potential for toxin formation in the product that would not be destroyed during reheating, this procedure is not acceptable.

Control Measures

Once cooked, oxtails may be maintained in one of three ways:

- Hot held at 135° or above;
- Held for four hours or less using time as a public health control with the proper documentation; or
- Properly cooled and then held at 41°F until ordered, at which time the product is reheated and served immediately to the customer.

Caribbean - Patties

Background

The Jamaican patty, similar to an English meat-pie or a Spanish empanada, contains a tasty chicken or beef filling seasoned with island spices and baked within a flaky crust. In Jamaica, patties are the fast food of choice, outselling hamburgers and pizzas because they are tasty, filling and easy to prepare and eat. It is commonly eaten at lunch but may be served at any meal.

Preparation Procedure

The ground meat is sautéed with special seasonings and then baked in a firm, flaky pastry crust. Some restaurants add the meat to a mixture of mashed cooked vegetables (potatoes, onions, carrots) before filling the pastry shell.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factors – Food From Unsafe Sources / Improper Holding Temperatures

Food From Unsafe Sources

Most Jamaican food establishments don't make their own patties because it is too labor intensive. Many establishments order them from commercial processors, but a significant number have been found to purchase them locally from unlicensed vendors, so it's important to check the source.

A restaurant is permitted to make and serve its own patties, but in order to sell patties to other restaurants, it must have a permit to be a wholesale processor of the product.

Even if a local processing plant is licensed, it is important to make sure the patties are transported in approved containers and in an approved manner. Local producers have been known to package patties in reused cardboard boxes. Since local processors of meat products are not required to use refrigerated trucks to transport their products to retailers, the temperature of the patties should be carefully checked at the time of delivery and rejected if above the required cold holding temperature of 41°F or below.

Improper Holding Temperatures

Another concern with patties is holding temperatures. Patties, whether vegetarian or containing meat, must be properly held after preparation. Operators will sometimes place patties in cases that are designed to hot hold foods, but will not have the units turned on, or have the units' temperature high enough to safely maintain the product.

Control Measures

- Determine the origin of the patties being used in the establishment, whether they are commercially processed or made in-house.
- If they purchase them commercially, ascertain that they are from an approved vendor by reviewing the invoice and examining the product and packaging. Patties containing meat shall have a USDA or State Department of Agriculture emblem on the package. State inspected meat or poultry cannot be shipped across state lines.
- If the patties are being purchased from a local processor, you may need to follow up with the processor to be sure the patties are being prepared in an approved, licensed processing plant and that they are being properly shipped.
- Make sure any cooked patties that are not being served immediately are continuously hot held at 135°F or above.
- If the filling for patties has been pre-cooked in-house, the patties must be reheated to 165°F for hot holding and then held continuously at 135 °F, or held for no more than 4 hours with the proper documentation. After 4 hours, any remaining patties must be discarded.
- If packaged, commercially processed pre-cooked patties are used, they must be reheated to 135°F for hot holding, or reheated to any temperature if they are for immediate service.

Caribbean - Pickled Products

Background

Many Caribbean restaurants use pickled meats in a variety of dishes. The meats include fish, pork (feet, tails, ears, knuckles) and beef. The beef and pork products usually come in five-gallon plastic buckets. Pickled fish may come in a five-gallon bucket or sealed, plastic packaging.

Preparation Procedure

Most pickled meat and fish products are used in soups or as ingredients in sauces and other recipes.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Improper Holding Temperatures

Many restaurants store pickled meat and fish products at room temperature, believing them to be safe because the product is pickled. The amount of salinity determines whether it can be held at room temperature. Some pickled products need to be refrigerated, so it is important to check each product.

All pickled meat product containers must bear a label that specifies that the product is packed in brine. If there is a question of whether the product is shelf stable, the manufacturer should be contacted for verification that the product does not require refrigeration.

Some facilities may attempt to pickle their own products in-house. Due to the lack of strict control at retail, any pickling of potentially hazardous products requires a variance and must be performed under a HACCP plan if they are to be held at room temperature. If the pickled products are maintained at 41°F or below, then there are no additional regulatory requirements for these products.

Control Measures

- Check label instructions on all pickled meats and fish to determine whether the product needs to be refrigerated.
- If unsure whether the product should be refrigerated, require the product to be refrigerated until its status can be verified with the manufacturer or the facility can provide documentation from the manufacturer stating otherwise.
- For potentially hazardous products pickled in-house, verify that a variance has been obtained from the regulatory authority and the facility is operating under a validated HACCP plan.

Caribbean - Plantains

Background

A plantain is a hard, starchy fruit of the banana family, used mostly for cooking, as contrasted with the soft, sweet variety that most people are familiar with. Plantains are a staple food in tropical regions of the world, used in much the same way as potatoes and with a similar neutral flavor and texture when unripe. While nearly identical in appearance as the bananas found in American grocery stores and markets, plantains are usually larger in size and have a thicker skin.

Preparation Procedure

Plantains can be pan fried, deep fried, boiled, sautéed, caramelized, grilled and baked.

Green plantains are firm and starchy and resemble potatoes in flavor. They can be cooked and mashed, added to stews or soups, or eaten as a side dish.

Yellow plantains are still firm and starchy but slightly sweeter. They can be boiled and mashed, baked or sauteed and served as a side dish.

Extremely ripe plantains are black, with a softer, deep yellow pulp that is much sweeter than the earlier stages of ripeness. These black plantains can be cooked, eaten raw or used in desserts.

Regulatory Concern – Misidentification

When a plantain is ripe, the outer skin turns black. Because of this, food safety inspectors often mistake ripe plantains for rotten bananas and require establishments to discard them.

Control Measures

- Recognize the difference between a plantain and a banana.
- Understand that a black plantain is the ripened stage of the fruit and may be used in food preparation.

Caribbean - Salfish

Background

Salfish is a popular ingredient in a variety of Caribbean dishes. Quite simply, it is a salted, dried fish, usually cod.

Preparation Procedure

The most popular dish in which salfish is used is Jamaica's national dish "ackee and salfish", but you may also find the following salfish dishes on a Caribbean menu: salfish pie, salfish cakes, fried salfish, salfish with pigtails, salfish stew, salfish patties and more.

Salfish is always rehydrated before it is used. This is done by soaking the fish in water, usually for a period of hours or even days, or boiled for a period of hours so that the fish becomes a moist product again. Only after it has been rehydrated is it added as an ingredient to menu items. It may be used immediately after rehydrating or held for a period of time before use.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Improper Holding Temperatures

Salfish in its dehydrated form is usually not held in refrigeration because its water activity is below .85. It is a salted product that has been soaked in a brine solution and then completely air-dried. As long as it remains in a dried state, it is not potentially hazardous.

Many food establishment proprietors believe that, because it is soaked in a brine solution and dried, salfish is not hazardous during any part of the prep process, including after rehydration and use in dishes. This is a false assumption. Once salfish is rehydrated, it is subject to the same handling and holding requirements as non-dehydrated fish.

Control Measures

- Fish must be cooled from ambient temperature to 41°F within four hours of rehydrating.
- Verify that the rehydrated salfish is maintained at 41°F prior to cooking.
- Once cooked, salfish dishes may be handled in one of the following ways:

- Hot held at 135°F or above;
- Held for four hours or less using time as a public health control with the proper documentation, then discarded if not consumed; or
- Cooked to order and immediately served, or properly cooled from 135°F to 70°F within two hours and then from 70°F to 41°F in the remaining time, not to exceed a total of six hours for the entire cooling procedure. Once the product is cooled, it must be held at 41°F or below until ordered, at which time the product can be reheated and served immediately to the customer.

Determining Approved Source **With Meat and Poultry Products**

Following is information that will guide you in determining whether goat, oxtails, brains, tripe and other meat and poultry products are USDA approved.

Inspection & Grading - What are the differences?

The inspection and grading of meat and poultry are two separate programs within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Inspection for wholesomeness is mandatory and is paid for out of tax dollars. Grading for quality is voluntary, and the service is requested and paid for by meat and poultry producers/processors.

Inspection

Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act, FSIS inspects all raw meat and poultry sold in interstate and foreign commerce, including imported products. The agency monitors meat and poultry products after they leave federally inspected plants, so you may find FSIS compliance officers in retail establishments, or be asked questions about them by retail managers.

In addition, FSIS monitors state inspection programs, which inspect meat and poultry products sold only within the state in which they were produced. The 1967 Wholesome Meat Act and the 1968 Wholesome Poultry Products Act require state inspection programs to be "at least equal to" the Federal inspection program. If states choose to end their inspection program or cannot maintain this standard, FSIS must assume responsibility for inspection within that state. There are currently 25 states and territories that allow USDA to conduct all meat and poultry inspections. They are: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands and Washington.

Identifying USDA Inspected Meats and Poultry

Meat that has been federally inspected and passed for wholesomeness is stamped with a round purple mark. The firm is also allowed to use the USDA state inspection mark on labels of inspected meat or poultry in bulk containers or individual consumer-sized packages. The dye used to stamp the grade and inspection marks onto a meat carcass is made from a food-grade vegetable dye and is not harmful. The mark is put on carcasses and major cuts. After trimming it might not appear on retail cuts such as roasts and steaks. A retail food store cannot use the USDA or state inspection marks on its labels because they are not inspected by USDA. However, meat that is packaged in an inspected facility

will have an inspection mark that identifies the plant on the label. (See graphic images below.)

Safe Handling Instructions

The requirements in the new final rule on Pathogen Reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) are designed to minimize the likelihood of harmful bacteria being present in raw meat and poultry products. However, some bacteria could be present and might become a problem if meat and poultry are not handled properly and kept refrigerated. To assist food handlers, USDA requires that safe handling instructions be put on all consumer-sized packages of raw and not fully cooked meat and poultry.



Meat



Poultry



Processed Meat Products

Safe Handling Instructions

This product was prepared from inspected and passed meat and/or poultry. Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.



Keep refrigerated or frozen.
Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.



Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods.
Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards),
utensils, and hands after touching raw meat or poultry.



Cook thoroughly.



Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers
immediately or discard.

Haitian - Griot (Grillot)

Background

Griot, or grillot as it is sometimes called, is a popular Haitian dish made of deep fried marinated pork that is served with a very spicy sauce called 'sauce ti malice'. The sauce contains sour oranges, lemons, limes, hot peppers, onion, salt and spices.

In traditional Haitian restaurants, the chef shops each morning for the ingredients he will need to prepare the menu items. Because they shop daily and do not store a lot of product on site, many facilities will have only one cooler. Food is an integral part of the Haitian community and if restaurants do not serve quality food, operators fear that they will lose their customer base. Therefore, many facilities do not serve leftovers. They try to cook what they need for the day based on customer traffic.

Traditionally, pork is considered an evening meal and is not served until 4:00 p.m. in the Haitian culture. However, as operations have grown in the United States, they now offer it all day. When the more labor intensive menu items sell out in the facility, griot is a staple dish that is sold.

Preparation Procedure

First the pork is cut into cubes and marinated with lime juice, lemon juice, sour orange juice, green chili pepper, chopped onion, garlic and salt. Next it is boiled in a small amount of water until tender. Once cooked, the mixture is drained, battered and deep fried until crispy. The sauce is then added and it is simmered until served. The completed dish is typically served with fried plantains and red beans and rice.

Regulatory Concern – Misidentification

Haitian cuisine has a strong French influence because of French colonization of the island from the late 1600s to the early 1800s. As a result, the names of many Haitian dishes (including 'griot') are based on French Creole words. When 'griot' appears on the menu of a Haitian restaurant, it is referring to the fried pork dish described above.

Control Measures

- Understand that 'griot' refers to a fried pork dish and should be regulated in the same way as any pork product.

Haitian - Legume

Background

Legume is a Haitian stew made of vegetables and either beef, pork, crab or combinations of the three.

Preparation Procedure

The meat is cooked in tomato paste and seasonings. A variety of vegetables are chopped and boiled with spices such as parsley, thyme, salt, black pepper and garlic. The vegetables typically include eggplant, chayote (squash), carrots, cabbage and green beans. The vegetables are boiled down to a thick mash, then drained and added to the meat pot. The dish is then further cooked for about one hour and then held hot until service. When all of the legume is served, operators do not cook another batch until the next day.

Some restaurants prepare legume every two days. Legume is one of the few items that may be held overnight in a Haitian restaurant. In these facilities, the legume may be reheated to order in a salted skillet in a small quantity of oil with garlic and beef or chicken broth.

Regulatory Concern – Misidentification

To the inexperienced eye, legume appears to be a mush whose ingredients are not apparent. Inspectors need to know what the ingredients are and that the dish may contain beef, pork or crab. Legume must be cooked to at least 145°F and maintained at 135 °F if hot held.

Control Measures

- Understand what ingredients are used in legume and regulate the dish accordingly.

Haitian - Meat Preparation

Background

Like many island populations, the Haitian people have learned over time how to combat the effects of the tropical heat on foods by coming up with unique and innovative preparation procedures. This is especially true in the case of meats, which undergo a special cleaning and marinating process.

In Haiti, many homes and eating establishments still do not have refrigeration, so the tradition continues to be a part of everyday cooking and has extended to culinary practices in Haitian restaurants in the United States.

Preparation Procedure

Raw animal foods used in Haitian cuisine are cleaned via a special method. The procedure varies based on the commodity, but generally involves the application of acid.

The procedure for cleaning chicken and goat is to first wash the items in cold water. Vinegar and salt are then added to the water. Next, the meat is wiped with sour lemons or sour oranges and then boiled in water with limes or sour oranges. After boiling, the product is drained, rewashed and seasoned before it is cooked in various dishes.

Another common meat item used in Haitian restaurants is oxtails. They are cleaned in the same manner as the chicken and goat, except that they are not preboiled.

Fish is also widely consumed in the Haitian population. Fish is meticulously cleaned, and veins are removed from the gill area. No hot water is put on the fish; it is only washed in cold water with vinegar and lemon prior to seasoning and then cooking.

Larger Haitian facilities have employees whose sole responsibility is to clean the meat. In smaller facilities, all steps from shopping to cleaning to cooking are done by the chefs.

Regulatory Concern: Misunderstanding of Food Preparation Process

In the Haitian culture, the expectation is that food will be served hot. Whereas take-out is a way of life in facilities serving American fare, customers in Haitian restaurants purchase food to consume immediately. In some facilities, the customer's food is not actually prepared until he pays. Freshness is of the utmost importance and there are usually no frozen foods used. The goal each day is to

purchase, prepare and sell all food items. Some chefs shop as early as 4 a.m. for the foods that they will need to prepare for that day. They serve few or no leftovers.

There are two schools of thought regarding the preparation of the raw animal foods. One is that extreme cleaning is done to eliminate the smell of the animal. The goal is to serve food with plenty of flavor but without the animal smell. Others believe that the method for rigorously cleaning products may have evolved from an effort by previous generations to preserve perishable products due to the lack of refrigeration. Whichever is the case, research is needed to determine whether the cleaning procedure has an effect on the bacterial load on the food.

Control Measures

- Initiate a conversation with the operator to gain an understanding of the different stages of food preparation, receiving and storage practices/patterns, as well as the handling of leftovers if any are kept.