

HOME (/)
ABOUT
JOURNAL (/ABOUT)
MASTHEAD (/NEW-PAGE)
PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS (/PROSPECTIVE-MEMBERS)
SUBSCRIBE (/SUBSCRIBE)
STAFF RESOURCES (/STAFF-RESOURCES)
PUBLICATIONS
PUBLICATION ARCHIVE (/PUBLICATION-ARCHIVE)
VOLUME 1 (2009) (/VOLUME-1-2008-2009)
VOLUME 2 (2010) (/VOLUME-2-2009-2010)
VOLUME 3 (2011) (/VOLUME-3-2010-2011)
VOLUME 4 (2012) (/VOLUME-4-2011-2012)
VOLUME 5 (2013) (/VOLUME-5-2012-2013)
VOLUME 6 (2014) (/VOLUME-6-2013-2014)
VOLUME 7 (2015) (/VOLUME-7-2014-2015)
VOLUME 8 (2016) (/VOLUME-8-2015-2016)
VOLUME 9 (2017) (/VOLUME-9-2016-2017)
VOLUME 10 (2018) (/VOLUME-10-2018)
SYMPOSIUM
INFORMATION (/SYMPOSIUM)
BLOG
FULL BLOG (/FULL-BLOG)
BLOG ARCHIVE (/BLOG-ARCHIVE-1)

SUBMISSIONS (/SUBMISSIONS)

December 2, 2013 (/full-blog/2013/12/talk-turkey-to-me-chemicals-grades-and.html)

Talk Turkey to Me: Chemicals, Grades, and Temperatures Oh My! (/full-blog/2013/12/talk-turkey-to-me-chemicals-grades-and.html)



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By: Sara Johnston, Staff Member

This past week, news of arsenic-infested poultry from one of America's largest research-based pharmaceutical companies announced voluntary production halt of its product.[i] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn1) The arsenic announcement sent most Americans into a meat selection panic. Poultry and beef products are consistent ingredients to American diets, and announcements of harmful additives to these meats are nothing short of unsettling. With dozens of different brands in the freezer aisle, multiple options of cooking instructions, and few options of meat grades, what is the likelihood of a consumer's confidence in the meat they purchase? Unknown to many, beef is not the only meat with available grades; poultry products are also graded. With the Holidays right around the corner, what better opportunity to examine the appropriate grade, cooking instructions, and steps to have a clean turkey?

The pink coloration of turkey, regardless of grade, often worries consumers. Pink meat does not have the same red flag associated with it as beef.[ii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn2) Pink meat, as long as 165 °F throughout the turkey, is safe. [iii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn3) The

coloration difference emanates from oxygen-storing myoglobin, located in muscle cells and retains oxygen from food in the blood until the animal's cells need it. [iv] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn4) The reasons coloration remains after cooking are: chemical changes during cooking, natural nitrites, turkey's young age, and grilling. [v] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn5)

If a turkey is issued a grade, this alone entails the bird has gone through laborious review processes by USDA graders who follow official standards developed by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. [vi] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn6) Grade A, the most common grade, means absence of defects such as feathers and bruises. [vii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn7) Depending on the number of defects, the turkey may be down-graded to B or C. When considering grade, it is important the consumer consider age. Younger turkeys will be labeled as fryer-roaster, young hen, or young tom and will have tender and plump meat. [viii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn8)

Chemicals and bacteria become concerns with birds taking hours to thaw, potentially feeding a dozen people. When thawing a large turkey, it is important not to thaw the bird on a counter, or garage. [ix] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn9) Thawing can be accomplished through refrigerator thawing, cold-water thawing, and microwave thawing. [x] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn10) Refrigerator thawing takes 24 hours for every five pounds of meat. [xi] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn11) Cold water thawing takes less time than refrigerator thawing, but more attention, as bacteria can reach into the packing if not properly sealed. [xii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn12) Microwave thawing is the fastest safe method, but requires immediate cooking after thawing. [xiii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn13)

In order to avoid chemical scares, the safest, but more expensive route is to buy organic and cage free birds. The FDA's lethargic action tactics to force meat distributors to discontinue arsenic, penicillin, and other toxins has caused confidence in our governmental monitoring programs to dissipate. [xiv] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn14) Poultry feed containing toxins to increase appetite and weight gain in animals is thought to be harmless, however, once the arsenic is digested, it becomes a carcinogen. [xv] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_edn15) It is unfortunate the answer to choosing a healthy meal for your family needs to be a more expensive one, even after choosing the right grade and preparation method, but it seems that until the FDA enacts more ambitiously to monitor guidelines keeping us safe from carcinogens, organic is the best option.

[i] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref1) Nitro (Rosasone) And Chicken. U.S. Food & Drug Admin.,

<http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/ProductSafetyInformation/ucm257540.htm> (last updated Sept. 6, 2013).

[ii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref2) Is Pink Turkey Meat Safe? U.S. Food & Drug Admin., available at

http://www.fda.usda.gov/wps/portal/fda/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/poultry-preparation/is-pink-turkey-meat-safe/_CT_Index (last modified Aug. 02, 2013).

[iii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref3) Id.

[iv] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref4) Id.

[v] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref5) Id.

[vi] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref6) Craig A. Morris, Let's Talk Turkey About USDA Poultry Grades, U.S. Food & Drug Admin., (Nov. 18, 2013, 10:15 AM), <http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/11/18/lets-talk-turkey-about-usda-poultry-grades/>.

[vii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref7) Id.

[viii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref8) Id.

[ix] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref9) Kathy Bernard, The Big Thaw For Thanksgiving, USDA FOOD & SAFETY INSPECTION SERVICE, available at <http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/11/19/the-big-thaw-for-thanksgiving>.

[x] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref10) Id.

[xi] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref11) Id.

[xii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref12) Id.

[xiii] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref13) Id.

[xiv] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ednref14) James Greiff, What was Arsenic Doing in Our Chicken Anyway?, BLOOMBERG (Oct. 10,

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