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Guidelines for the Safe Transportation of Carcasses, Poultry and Meat Products

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines apply to everyone who handles, transports, distributes and stores meat products and carcasses destined for public sale and human consumption. This includes owners and operators of food premises, such as food premises on the property of licensed slaughter establishments, cut and wrap facilities, food retailers and those who transport meat products to any of these facilities.

Background

Operators of food premises in British Columbia must ensure that meat intended for public sale is fit for human consumption. Operators and those who transport meat products are required to protect meat from contamination. They must also store, handle, prepare, display and dispense these foods in a sanitary manner as part of their routine operations and inspection program.

Meat products processed at slaughter or cut-and-wrap facilities have the potential to be soiled with a variety of biological, chemical and physical contaminants if not handled, stored and transported under appropriate conditions. Inadequate controls to protect meat can compromise meat product safety by creating unacceptable levels of risk for consumers. For example, meat products that are not maintained at appropriate temperatures are subject to spoilage or the multiplication of disease-causing microorganisms or parasites that present a risk to human health.

Proper transportation of carcasses and meat products will reduce the potential for contamination. The following guidelines are provided to assist those who transport meat products.

GUIDELINES

Carcass Cleanliness

- Ensure carcasses intended for human consumption and destined for sale have been slaughtered at a licensed establishment. Domestic animals slaughtered for personal use, or hunted wild animals, are the only exceptions to this rule. All carcasses should be examined and deemed to be clean, wholesome and fit for human consumption, which is an important quality-control step.
- Ensure carcasses being transported to an approved cut-and-wrap facility are clean and not contaminated before or during transport. Carcasses should be free from contaminants such as blood, hair, offal, manure or vegetation.
- The hide on the carcass of animals should be removed to enable rapid chilling of the carcass and to limit microbial growth. Only those experienced and knowledgeable in hide removal should carry out this task. In some cases, it may be necessary to leave the hide on the carcass while en-route to an approved cut-and-wrap facility. In both situations, protect carcasses (with or without hide) during transport by protecting from contamination and by chilling as described below.
- The operator of an approved cut-and-wrap facility should refuse any meat that appears to be diseased, unwholesome, spoiled or otherwise unfit, so it is essential to ensure protection of the carcass during transport.

Loading, Unloading and Transportation

- Inspect the vehicle before loading. Remove items that may contaminate meat products, including fuel, oil, antifreeze, or residues such as wood fragments, gravel, sand and garbage.

- Wash the vehicle, containers and equipment used for transport, and allow to air dry. Sanitize food contact surfaces.
- Ensure loading and unloading methods prevent product contact with the floor, ground or other surfaces that may be contaminated. Ensure any equipment or surfaces that contact meat products are made of nontoxic, noncorrosive materials that can be effectively cleaned.
- Practice good personal hygiene. Wash hands and exposed portions of arms thoroughly in an adequate hand-washing facility before loading and unloading, and as often as necessary—especially after smoking, eating, drinking or using the toilet or urinal. Do not eat food, drink beverages or use tobacco in any form while loading and unloading. Wear clean outer garments and some form of hair restraint.
- Provide insulated containers with securely attached lids for smaller-sized products.
- Provide a clean, designated protective tarp, industry-approved shipping bags/ shrouds or other suitable covers for products too large to fit in insulated containers. Tarps should be thoroughly sanitized and properly stored for future use (consider storing in freezer). Securely fasten covers during transport.
- Pack meat products in a manner that separates them from other products to prevent cross-contamination. Use separate containers for raw and cooked or ready-to-eat products.

Maintaining Cold Temperatures

- All meat products intended for public sale and human consumption must be transported under proper temperature conditions. Transport wrapped meat products in refrigerated vehicles (or in insulated containers with clean ice packs or in ice from approved sources for short trips). Ensure carcasses and other meat products have been properly chilled to 4°C or colder at the slaughter or cut-and-wrap facility before loading. Check the temperature with an accurate thermometer before accepting the product. Maintain products at 4°C or colder during transport. Hold frozen products at -18°C or colder, and ship in a way that prevents thawing and refreezing.
- Consider the time of day and weather conditions before accepting meat products for transport. For example, if high temperatures are forecasted, arrange to pick up the shipment earlier in the day. If possible, avoid transporting on days with unsuitable weather.
- Never allow meat products to be kept out of refrigeration for more than two hours unless other suitable means of maintaining temperatures are used.

Environmental Factors

- Travel on dirt or gravel roads and exposure to wind, rain and direct sun may increase the risk of contamination or product damage, especially if meat products are unpackaged. Transport in open environments may also expose meat products to pests. As pests can carry diseases, products must not be exposed to conditions that permit pest access. Ensure tarps or covers are secured and consider double coverings. Keep containers closed and minimize loading and unloading times.

Traceability

In addition to preventing contamination and maintaining temperatures, another critical public-health

safeguard is the ability to determine the origin of meat products that may be related to known incidents of food-borne illness. The ability to trace products to their farm of origin or slaughter establishment and to any establishments involved in processing is essential so that products posing a risk to consumers can be effectively recalled from the market.

1. If purchasing a carcass specifically from a Farmgate or Farmgate Plus slaughter establishment, the operator must be given, in writing:
 - The name, address and ID number of the slaughter establishment;
 - The net weight of the carcass.

2. If purchasing a packaged meat product from a carcass that originated from a Farmgate licence holder's slaughter establishment, the package must be labelled with:
 - The name and address of the slaughter establishment;
 - A description of the contents of the package;
 - The net weight or volume of the contents of the package;
 - The ID number of the slaughter establishment; and
 - The words, "Not Government Inspected; For sale only in the regional district of [name of regional district in which the Farmgate slaughter establishment is located], or at a temporary food market within 50 km of the slaughter establishment. Not for resale".

3. If purchasing a packaged meat product from a carcass that originated from a Farmgate Plus licence holder's slaughter establishment, the package must be labelled with:
 - The name and address of the slaughter establishment;
 - A description of the contents of the package;
 - The net weight or volume of the contents of the package;
 - The ID number of the slaughter establishment; and
 - The words, "Not Government Inspected".

4. The operator must not resell a carcass that was slaughtered at a Farmgate licence holder's slaughter establishment nor a meat product that was made from a carcass slaughtered at a Farmgate licence holder's slaughter establishment.

5. If the operator wishes to resell a carcass or a meat product made from a Farmgate Plus licence holder's slaughter establishment, the operator must ensure that:
 - If the carcass or meat product is packaged, the package must be labelled with the ID number of the Farmgate Plus slaughter establishment and the words, "Not Government Inspected";
 - If the carcass or meat product is not packaged, the operator must advise the purchaser, in writing, that the carcass or the carcass from which the meat product was made, was not government inspected.

For further information on the labelling of meat products originating from Farmgate Plus slaughter establishments, please consult the *Guidelines on the Handling and Labelling of Meat that is Not Government Inspected*.

Conclusion

Meat products must be protected from contamination and temperatures must be properly maintained during transportation. Discard any products that became contaminated or were not properly temperature controlled during transport.

Remember, operators of food premises, including individuals transporting or distributing meat products, are responsible for ensuring meat products intended for sale to the public are fit for human consumption.

If you need clarification on any aspect of these guidelines, please contact your local health authority.

References

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