



Food Safety Information

Goat from Farm to Table

With the emerging popularity of Caribbean and Indian cuisine in America, goat meat is being used increasingly. Goats are under mandatory USDA inspection. Read on for more information about this red meat.

Background on Goat

Goat is thought to have been the earliest animal domesticated besides sheep and dogs. Cave art 10,000 to 20,000 years ago indicates that goats were common and important then. At the present time, goats provide the principle source of animal protein in many North African and Middle Eastern nations. Goat is also important in the Caribbean, in Southeast Asia, and developing tropical countries. Three-fourths of all the goats in the world are located in the developing regions of the world.

Kids (goats under a year of age) are often slaughtered when 3 to 5 months of age and weighing from 25 to 50 pounds. Kids do not store much body fat until they are about a year of age. Many goats are older than a year and heavier when marketed, but most, except aged cull goats, are slaughtered when less than a year of age. The meat of older goats is darker and less tender, but more juicy and flavorful than kid. The meat from male goats is lighter in color and lower in fat. The meat from female goats is more desirable for steaks and chops because it is more tender.

How are Goats Raised for Food?

In the U.S., there are four distinct types of goats:

1. Dairy goats, raised primarily for milk;
2. Spanish or Mexican goats, produced for meat on a variety of open rangeland;
3. South African Boer goats, a recently introduced breed that can adapt to various climates and can rebreed while still nursing; and
4. Angora goats, raised primarily for their wool used to make cloth.

Excess males and cull goats are also used for meat. The Spanish and Angora goats are increasing in numbers in the Southwestern States, primarily in Texas. On brushy ranges, they improve the pasture for cattle and sheep by eating large amounts of twigs, shrubs, and brush.

Are Goats Inspected?

Goats are covered under the U.S. Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906 and thus must be slaughtered under Federal or State inspection. Any carcasses slaughtered for sale must be inspected. Following are the number of goats federally inspected in various years.

2004	558,857
1999	463,249
1994	364,905
1989	230,297
1984	107,299

Is Goat Meat Graded?

No. There are no quality or yield grades for goat meat.

Can Hormones and Antibiotics be Used When Raising Goats?

Hormones are not approved for growth promotion in goats.

Antibiotics may be given to prevent or treat diseases in goats.

A “withdrawal” period is required from the time most antibiotics are administered until it is legal to slaughter the animal. This is so residues have enough time to exit the animal’s system.

Goat meat is tested for antibiotics, sulfonamides, and pesticide residues if problems are suspected. Imported goat meat is sampled at ports of entry for residues that may result from the use of animal drugs, pesticides, or environmental contaminants. Data from residue monitoring rarely show residue violations.

Retail Cuts of Goat

Retail cuts of goat are similar to those for lamb or mutton. Goat should have light pink to bright red, firm, fine-grained flesh with well-distributed white fat. In some breeds of goat, there can be color variation between males and females; in other breeds, there is no difference.

Where is Goat Meat Consumed?

The demand for meat from goats has increased in some markets of the Southeastern USA, which has led to new marketing opportunities for the small farmer/rancher. There has been an increase in the influx of ethnic groups from areas of the world where goat meat comprises a significant portion of the diet. In addition, there has been an increase in the consumption of “ethnic” foods as consumers explore and broaden their culinary experiences. Goat meat is often served in specialty dishes centered around festival or holiday events.

Is Goat Classified as “Red” Meat?

Yes, goat is considered red meat.

Safe Handling of Goat Meat

At the grocery store, make your selection of goat meat from the refrigerator case just before checking out at the register. Put packages of raw meat in disposable plastic bags (if available) to contain any leakage, which could cross-contaminate cooked foods or raw produce. Take packaged meat home immediately and refrigerate it at 40 °F or below; use within 3 to 5 days (1 or 2 days for ground goat meat), or freeze (0 °F or below) for up to a year. However, if kept frozen continuously, it will be safe indefinitely.

Before and after handling any raw meat or poultry, always wash hands in warm, soapy water for 20 seconds.

Safe Thawing

There are three ways to thaw meat: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave. Never thaw on the counter or in other non-refrigerated locations. It’s best to plan ahead for slow, safe thawing in the refrigerator. To thaw in cold water, do not remove packaging. Be sure the package is airtight or put it into a leakproof bag. Submerge the package in cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes to be sure it stays cold. Cook immediately.

When microwave-defrosting meat, plan to cook it immediately after thawing because some areas of the food may become warm and begin to cook during microwaving-defrosting. Partially cooking food is not recommended because any bacteria present wouldn’t have been destroyed.

Foods defrosted in the microwave or by the cold water method should be cooked before refrigerating or refreezing because they may have been held at temperatures above 40 °F, where bacteria multiply rapidly.

Cooking of Goat Meat

For safety, cook ground goat meat to 160 °F. Roasts, steaks and chops can be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 145 °F as measured with a food thermometer. Less tender cuts should be braised (roasted or simmered with a small amount of liquid in a tightly covered pan) or stewed.

Kid meat lends itself to all recipes for lamb: chops, leg or shoulder, crown roasts, rack or saddle, and kebabs. A goat carcass rarely has much fat to protect it from drying. Goat meat is generally quite lean, although its higher moisture content makes it tender when handled properly.

The meat of adult goats is almost always subjected to stewing because of its relative toughness, but in stews, it is flavorful and tender.

Storage Times

Consumers should follow these tips for home storage of goat meat.

- Follow handling recommendations on the product. Keep meat in its package until it's ready to be used.
- Take goat meat home immediately and refrigerate at 40 °F or below.
- For best quality, use ground or cubed goat meat (such as stew meat) within 2 days of purchase and larger cuts within 3 to 5 days, or freeze the meat at 0 °F or below.
- It is safe to freeze meat in its original packaging. If freezing longer than 2 months, overwrap as you would any food for long-term storage.
- Ground or cubed goat meat will keep its best quality in the freezer for 4 months. Larger cuts, such as chops, steaks, legs, or loins, will keep their best quality 6 to 9 months; ground meat, 3 to 4 months. Frozen goat meat remains safe indefinitely if kept frozen continuously.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7.



AskKaren.gov