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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Keeping Your Food Safe During a Weather Emergency
*Ohio Department of Agriculture Experts Provide Guidelines
to Keep Food Safe During Ice and Snow Storms*

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio (Feb. 2, 2011) – Losing power from a snow or ice storm could jeopardize the safety of your food. Knowing how to determine if your food is safe, and the steps to take to help keep it safe, can help minimize food loss and reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Ohio Department of Agriculture experts urge all Ohioans to use the following information provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service to help keep their families safe during snow and ice storms.

Steps to follow to prepare for a possible weather emergency

- Keep items on hand that do not require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on an outdoor grill. Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply. Make sure you have ready-to-use baby formula for infants and pet food. Remember to use these items and replace them from time to time. Be sure to keep a hand-held can opener for an emergency.
- Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer. An appliance thermometer indicates the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer. In the case of a power outage, it can help determine the safety of the food.
- Make sure the freezer is at 0 °F or below and the refrigerator is at 40 °F or below.
- Freeze containers of water ahead of time for ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers after the power is out. Freeze gel packs for use in coolers.
- Freeze refrigerated items such as leftovers, milk and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately — this helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.
- Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.
- Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerated food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours.
- Group food together in the freezer – this helps the food stay cold longer.

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Steps to follow after a weather emergency

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- The refrigerator will keep food safe for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) and the door remains closed.
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers, and deli items after 4 hours without power.
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40 °F or below when checked with a food thermometer.
- Never taste a food to determine its safety!
- Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible in situations where the power could be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic-foot full freezer for 2 days.
- If the power has been out for several days, check the temperature of the freezer with an appliance thermometer. If the appliance thermometer reads 40 °F or below, the food is safe to refreeze.
- 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.
- Never place perishable food out in the snow. Outside temperatures can vary and food can be exposed to unsanitary conditions and animals. Instead, make ice. Fill buckets, empty milk containers, or cans with water and leave them outside to freeze. Use this ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers.

For a complete chart of when to keep and when to throw out specific refrigerated and frozen foods, go to:

www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Keeping_Food_Safe_During_an_Emergency/index.asp.

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