



Food Safety

Vermont meat and poultry labeling and packaging requirements

UVM Extension Fact Sheet- April 2011

Labeling requirements:

- Meat and inspected poultry must be labeled with the following to meet Vermont OR USDA requirements¹:
 - 1) Name of product (terminology to be approved before use)
 - 2) Ingredient listing (if product contains 2 or more ingredients). Ingredients must be listed in order of predominance.
 - 3) Name and address of business, including zip code. The farm logo or image can also be included.
 - 4) Net weight statement (size of lettering is governed by package size)
 - 5) Official Inspector legend (state or federal legend with plant establishment number)
 - 6) A handling statement (i.e.: keep refrigerated or keep frozen)
 - 7) Safe handling instructions (see text in box 1, below)
 - 8) Large meat processors are required to include nutrition facts for all products with 2 or more ingredients. After Jan 1, 2012, large meat processors must also label most single ingredient meat products with nutrition facts. However, all current Vermont processors and producers are exempted from this due to their small size². Note that some retail stores do require nutrition facts, and customers generally appreciate seeing nutrition facts on the products they purchase.

NOTE: False or misleading labels or claims are NOT allowed. A food product can NOT be sold as an imitation of another product UNLESS it is labeled as such. More information on the claims allowed on labels is listed below.

For further information, contact the Vermont Meat Inspection Service, VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) (802-828-2426). DO NOT PRINT LABELS WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL from VT Agency of Ag. More information on the process of label development and approval is listed below.

- Uninspected poultry (see inspection matrix) must be labeled with the following:
 - a) Name of farm and name of producer
 - b) Address of farm including zip code
 - c) The statement (prominently displayed): “Exempt per 6 VSA § 3312(b): NOT INSPECTED³”

¹ More information on USDA meat and poultry labeling requirements is available from http://www.fsis.usda.gov/regulations_&_policies/labeling_policies/index.asp or in 9CFR 317

² Companies with ≤500 employees and ≤100,000 pounds processed per year are exempted. See 9 CFR.317.400 a1ii for federal meat regulations, 9CFR381.500 a1ii for poultry.

³ View the entire legislation at <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/fullsection.cfm?Title=06&Chapter=204&Section=03312>.

d) Safe handling and cooking instructions as follows:

“SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

Keep refrigerated or frozen. Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.

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

Cook thoroughly to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees F maintained for at least 15 seconds.

Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.”

e) Net weight of the product⁴

f) Note that the poultry must be kept cold (≤ 15 F if frozen, or ≤ 40 F if refrigerated) in storage, transport, and while selling.

Label claims⁵:

- Nutrient claims about a product, such as “lean” or “low-fat” must be verified at the producer’s expense, and the producer must have documentation to substantiate that the product meets the requirements for the definition.
- For “Certified Organic” claims, contact the certifying agency (such as NOFA-VT⁶).
- Claims regarding production methods such as “grass fed”, “free range” or “raised without antibiotics” must have approval from the Labeling and Program Delivery Division of USDA⁷ (if USDA inspected), or from the VT Agency of Ag (if state inspected)⁸
- Claims such as “humanely raised” are certified by appropriate independent auditors
- There are NO provisions to claim “antibiotic free” or “hormone free”. The claim “chemical free” is expressly prohibited.

Packaging⁹:

- All packaging materials directly in contact with a food product must be FDA approved food grade packaging.

Storage and transport:

- **Products must be stored (transported, and sold) at <15 F if frozen, or <40 F if refrigerated.** These temperatures should be checked during storage, transport, and selling. Ensure that juices of one species do not drip onto and contaminate another species. The vehicle used for transport must be clean and sanitary.

Process of label development and approval:

- 1) Producer should ask their processing plant for a label they normally use (including their inspection legend) to be used as a layout model for new label.
- 2) The label can be brought to a printer, who will take off the plant logo and can add that the product is “Packed for (insert the name of your farm here)”

⁴ Vermont Weight and Measures legislation (9 VSA 73 §2691). Product must be weighed with a state-certified scale. The VAAFM Consumer Protection Bureau can check and certify the scale (for free).

⁵ More information on these claims is available from: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&Policies/claims_guidance/index.asp

⁶ <http://nofavt.org/>

⁷ http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&Policies/Label_Application_Guidance/index.asp

⁸ These claims must be substantiated by adequate documentation, including a written protocol of the production system used in raising that animal. An affidavit stating the management practices used will need to accompany each animal to the slaughter facility, and each animal should have a tag of identification.

⁹ <http://dwb.unl.edu/Teacher/NSF/C10/C10Links/www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/pubs/meatpack.htm>

- 3) This sketch from the printer should be submitted to one of the following for approval:
 - a) For state-inspected product (with or without label claims): the VAAFM Meat Inspection State Office in Montpelier
 - b) For USDA-inspected product WITHOUT label claims: the USDA inspector at the plant where the product will be processed.
 - c) For USDA-inspected product with special label claims (see above for information on label claims): USDA labeling office in Washington DC. Note that this process normally takes 4-6 weeks.
([http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations & Policies/Label Application Guidance/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations%20&%20Policies/Label%20Application%20Guidance/index.asp)).
- 4) After the sketch is approved, the label can be printed.

Box 1. Text required for “Safe Handling Instructions” for inspected meat and poultry

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.

*Fact sheet prepared by Dr. Londa Nwadike, UVM Extension Food Safety Specialist,
londa.nwadike@uvm.edu; tel: 802-223-2389; 617 Comstock Road, Berlin, VT 05602*

Fact sheet reviewed by:

- *Jessie Schmidt, UVM Extension Coordinator for Community & Agriculture Programs*
- *Dr. Kathy McNamara, Assistant State Veterinarian and Head Of Service, Meat Inspection Section of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets*
- *Randy Quenneville, Meat Programs Section Chief, Vermont Meat Inspection Service, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets*

Some of the information in this document was adapted from a publication entitled “Meat and Poultry at the Market: What Producers and Vendors Need to Know”, which was published by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Foods and Markets in January 2010.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, Vermont. University of Vermont Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating, offer education and employment to everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.