

Bacon curing study results announced

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced results of a study comparing the taste, appearance and cooking characteristics of bacon cured three ways—with current levels of nitrite, with low nitrite and potassium sorbate, and with no preservative.

The study, by the department's Science and Education Administration, found bacon produced with current levels of nitrite and that cured with low nitrites and potassium sorbate have a similar shelf-life and cooking characteristics, but the bacon processed with sorbate has a slightly different taste and aroma, and the slices were more difficult to separate.

However, during the study, nine people handling or testing cooked cured bacon developed a slight swelling of the face and hands or mouth and throat irritation. An unknown number of people were involved in handling the bacon.

"There can be no direct relationship made at this time between individual symptoms and any particular ingredient," said SEA food technologists Brad W. Berry. "We don't know why reactions occurred, but studies are being done by the Food and Drug Administration to find the cause and determine the seriousness of the reactions."

Donald L. Houston, ad-

ministrator of the department's Food Safety and Quality Service said, "Any final approval of sorbate use in bacon, however, will be withheld by the department pending results of the studies."

The cooked bacon was evaluated by 10 taste panelists at Beltsville and seven at North Carolina State University. The panelists tasted, but did not swallow, the bacon. Taste-testing was conducted several days a week for three months. Of the 17 panelists, six, all of whom were at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, had mild reactions, as did three laboratory personnel handling the bacon at Beltsville.

"We aren't sure whether

the sorbate had any connection with the panelists' reaction," Berry said. "During the study panelists and laboratory personnel tested or handled bacon given three treatments, and from four different packing plants."

Potassium sorbate is not approved for use in bacon; however, it is on the Food and Drug Administration's list of food additives that are generally recognized as safe. Sorbate is used in a wide variety of other foods such as fats, oils, jams, relishes, soft candy, cheese, and processed fruits and vegetables. It is also used as a coating on Summer sausages to protect them from dehydration and mold formation.

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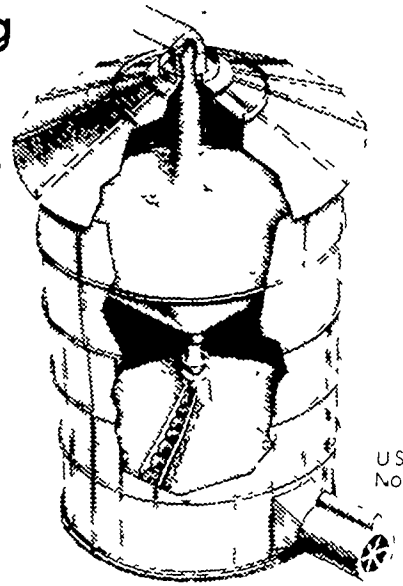
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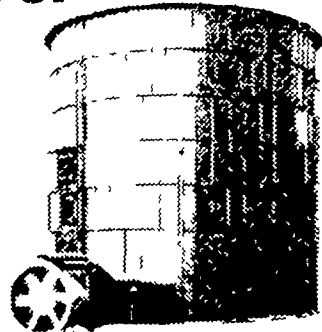
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