

Consuming Thoughts

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For Berks Co.



Planning a party at home to watch your favorite football team on TV may be safer than trying to maneuver through congested streets and crowds to get to the stadium. But the pressure may be on in the kitchen to get everything ready in time for kickoff. While you may not want to miss a single minute of the game, you certainly want to make sure your food is prepared safely.

To help you score a food safety touchdown, here are a few hints.

Select foods that need little or no preparation. Order a party platter, for instance. When you pick it up, be sure it's the last errand on your shopping trip. Then, take it home and store it in the refrigerator as quickly as possible. Remember to keep your refrigerator at 40 degrees F or less.

Take advantage of the deli, and purchase lunch meats or prepared

salads there. If you buy cold cuts to make your own platter, be sure to observe the "sell-by" or "use by" date marked on the package. Wrap the meats well to prevent them from drying out, and store the platter in the refrigerator. Kept in the original vacuum-sealed package, lunch meats can be stored safely in your refrigerator for two weeks. Once the package has been opened, wrap the meats well and use them within three to five days.

If you must cook, do it ahead of time. Cooking a ham, chicken or roast in advance will help keep you out of the kitchen during the game. However, be sure you don't cook them too far in advance, or you may run into problems with harmful or spoilage bacteria. Cooked meats and poultry can be sliced into small pieces, covered completely, and safely stored in a

refrigerator for three or four days, provided they aren't smothered with broth or gravy. Broth or gravy can harbor bacteria, so don't keep these foods in the refrigerator more than a day or two. For best results, drain and refrigerate the broth for gravy in a separate container and prepare it on the day of the dinner.

Another tip to help keep you out of the kitchen is to use a slow cooker to prepare Swedish meatballs, stews or other hot foods. Make sure the slow cooker is operated properly, by starting foods cooking on high and then reduce the temperature to a lower setting. Do not overstuff cooker, so the food can cook all the way through.

To spread a worry-free feast keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. The danger zone for bacterial growth is between 40 and 140 degrees F. Frequently wash your hands and any cutting surfaces, knives or other utensils used in food preparation. Cross-contamination can occur if a utensil or cutting board is used initially for raw meat or poultry and then for other foods.

If you're serving hot foods, heat them above 140 degrees F then, use chafing dishes or hot plates to keep the following foods hot: casseroles, stews, baked beans or cheese dips. If you can't keep all of the foods hot at once, store some in the refrigerator and heat them as needed to replenish the

serving dishes.

Also, keep track of how long cold foods have been in the refrigerator. Don't leave perishable foods out at room temperature for more than two hours. Put small portions out on the table and replenish them from the refrigerator. Discard all perishable foods that have been held at room temperature longer than the recommended

two-hour limit.

You can freeze leftovers, except for salads that contain mayonnaise. The mayonnaise will separate if frozen, and when you defrost the food, it will be oily. Most cooked red meats can be stored in the freezer up to three months and sliced chicken and turkey can be frozen for about a month.

4H Happenings

Chester County Captures 5 Championships

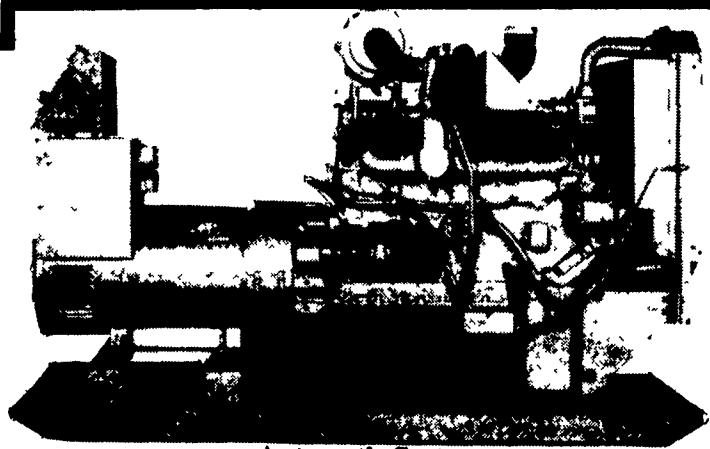
Chester County 4-H Dairy members won one junior championship and four reserve championships at the 49th Southeast District 4-H Dairy Show at the Kutztown Fairgrounds.

There were 207 animals exhibited from eight southeastern Pennsylvania counties including Berks, Bucks, Chester, Lehigh, Monroe, Montgomery, Northampton, and Schuylkill. Among the animals exhibited were 78 Holsteins, 27 Ayrshires, 17 Brown Swiss, 26 Guernseys, 51 Jerseys, six Milking Shorthorns, and two Linebacks.

Patty McMurray, 4-H leader and Holstein and Guernsey breeder from Washington County, Pennsylvania picked Rebecca Nolan's Winter Yearling, S & M

Ayr Irs Ola, for junior champion of the Ayrshire show. Rebecca is a first-year member from Cochranville. Kelly Young, West Grove, was chosen the reserve junior champion with Pure-Ayr Suzie Q Twinkie, a winter calf. Her sister, Kathryn Young, showed an outstanding junior 2-year-old Ayrshire, Pure-Ayr Surplus's R.R. Clover, for reserve senior and reserve grand champion.

In the Jersey breed, Erica Lloyd, Pottstown, was named the reserve senior and reserve grand champion with a fine senior 3-year-old, Patrick Joyce. Tarik Gaffney captured the reserve junior champion award with Top-O-Hill Admiral Thimble, a fall calf. In all, Chester County 4-H'ers took first place in 17 different age classes.



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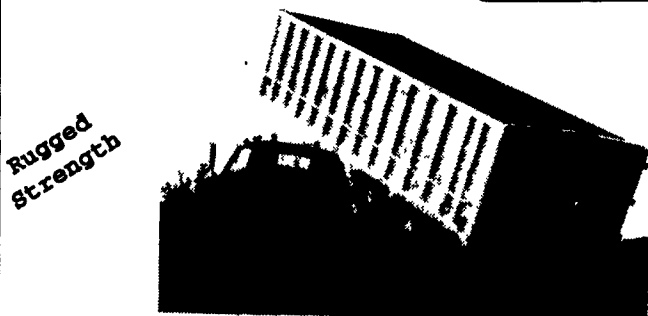
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