

PENpages Can Help You Find Facts Fast

UNIVERSITY PARK, (Centre Co.) — Looking for information on child care, money management, farm and home safety or agricultural statistics? What about low-fat cooking, nutrition guidelines or animal welfare?

Try PENpages, a computer-based library of consumer and agricultural information operated and maintained by Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. The free service can be accessed by dialing a local telephone number in Pennsylvania counties, and also can be accessed international-

ly via the Internet.

PENpages is devoted to agriculture-related information that encompasses an amazingly wide range of subjects. PENpages contains practical information on topics from conserving water to storing winter clothing.

PENpages is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All you need is a computer, communications software and a modem connected to a telephone line. In Pennsylvania, PENpages is accessed by dialing a special telephone number in each county.

Most users have toll-free access.

Much of the information is generated by experts in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. Other contributors include the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Penn State's College of Health and Human Development and Nutrition Center, Cornell University, Ohio State University, and West Virginia University.

There are six national databases in PENpages. IFAN, the International Food and Nutrition Database was established in 1992 and

now has over 1,700 articles on all aspects of human nutrition. MAPP, the Family and Economic Well-Being National Database, was established in 1986 in support of the USDA Extension Services Family Economic Well-Being National Initiative.

MAPP features information on stress management, family economics, individual development, child care and other family issues. Dr. James Van Horn, professor of rural sociology at Penn State and a syndicated Associated Press columnist, compiles and edits the documents appearing in MAPP from specialists throughout the country.

Information on aging issues can be found in the Senior Series Database, and information on rural health issues is located in the Rural Health Database. For youth issues, search the AH and Youth Development Database and for information on diversity topics, try the USDA-sponsored Cooperative Extension Service National Diversity and Pluralism Database.

Several state agencies also supply information for PENpages. The Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service (PASS), a divi-

sion of the state and federal departments of agriculture, compiles information on all major Pennsylvania agricultural commodities. This information is placed in PENpages and relayed to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service for inclusion in national statistics.

PASS is one of four PDA bureaus that place information in PENpages. The Bureau of Plant Industry puts a monthly plant pest update on the system, and the Bureau of Market Development posts current market and auction prices for livestock and produce. The PDA press office adds news and current information to the database.

People interested in using PENpages can obtain a free User Guide from the local Penn State Cooperative Extension office. The guide provides step-by-step instructions and local telephone numbers to call for each county. People who live outside Pennsylvania can obtain a User Guide by writing to Computer Services, 405 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802 or by calling (814) 863-3449.

Surprises By Mail

CREAMERY (Montgomery Co.) — Most of us like getting packages in the mail, but food shipped by mail needs special handling to avoid a real surprise — foodborne illness. This year, if you are the sender or the receiver, please follow safe food handling procedures. Annette Goodling of Montgomery County Cooperative Extension offers these food handling tips for perishable foods such as smoked turkey, cheese, and sausage gift packs.

TIPS FOR THE PURCHASER (SENDER)

- Check with the company — How the gift will be packaged? It should be packed in foam or heavy corrugated cardboard. If it's a perishable item like meat or poultry, it should be cold or frozen and packed with a cold source like the frozen gel packs.

- Speedy delivery — How the food will be shipped? If it's a perishable item, it should be delivered as quickly as possible, ideally, overnight. Make sure perishable items and the outer package are labeled "KEEP REFRIGERATED" to alert the recipient.

- Storage and preparation instructions — Will the food item come with storage and preparation instructions? Some mail order food gift items are of an unusual nature and some consumers may not know how to handle or prepare them.

- Arrange a delivery date — Tell the recipient if the company has promised a delivery date, or

alert the recipient that "the gift is in the mail" so that they or a neighbor can be home to receive it. Otherwise it may sit unsafely on the front porch or at the post office for hours or even days. Don't have perishable items delivered to an office unless you know it will arrive on a work day and there's refrigerator space available for keeping it cold.

TIPS FOR THE RECEIVER

- Check the temperature — When you receive a food item marked "Keep Refrigerated," open it immediately and check its temperature. Optimally, the food should arrive frozen or partially frozen with ice crystals still visible, or at least, refrigerator cold to the touch. If perishable food arrives warm notify the company if you think you deserve a refund. DO NOT eat the food. But remember, it's the shipper's responsibility to deliver perishable foods on time. It's the customer's responsibility to have someone at home to receive the package.

- Keep it cold — Refrigerate or freeze perishable items immediately. Even if a product is partially defrosted it is safe to freeze it, although there may be a slight loss of quality.

TIPS FOR THE MAIL-IT-YOURSELFER

- Pack it safely — Perishable foods will stay at a safe temperature longer if frozen solid first. After frozen, pack your food gift with a cold source such as a frozen gel pack or purchased dry ice.

- Use a sturdy box — pack your frozen food and cold source in a sturdy box, such as heavy foam or corrugated cardboard. Fill up any empty space with crushed paper or foam "popcorn." Air space in the box will cause the food and cold source to thaw faster.

- Label it perishable — Your package should be clearly labeled "Perishable - Keep Refrigerated." As in "Tips for the Purchaser," above, arrange a delivery date with the recipient. Ship your package by overnight delivery.

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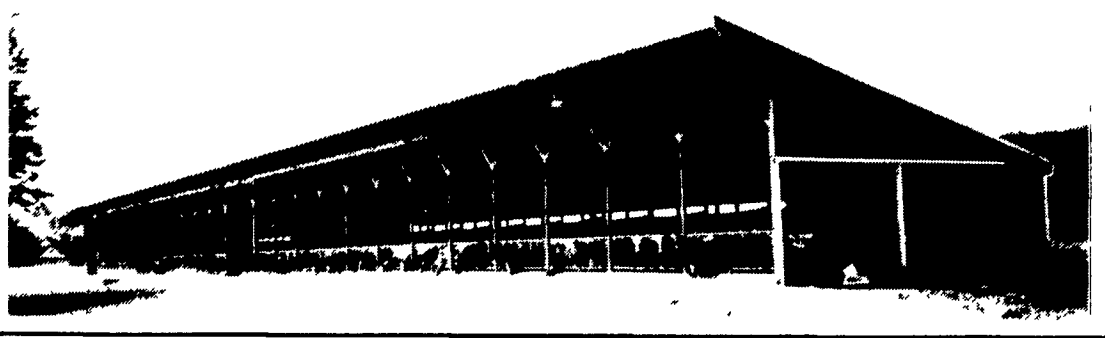
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