

Keep Food Safe When You're 'Powerless'

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Those thunderstorms so common during the summer months can do more than spoil a Fourth of July picnic. Heavy winds, excessive rain, and lightning can wreak havoc with utility lines, causing power failures that leave consumers without electricity for hours or even days.

Although you may be powerless to prevent such incidents, you can take actions to ensure the safety of your food supply when the lights go out, according to Dr. Mark A. Kantor, a nutrition and food safety specialist with the Maryland Cooperative Extension Service.

"First of all, purchase thermometers for the freezer and refrigerator so you can keep track of the temperature in case the power fails," he said. "The thermometers should be sturdy and designed specifically for this use. Many hardware stores and supermarkets carry them."

If your electricity is off for only a few hours, you don't have to take any special steps to protect your food supply, except to avoid opening the refrigerator and freezer doors. But a longer power failure will require some extra precautions.

If you're lucky enough to have a full freezer, Kantor said, you can expect food to remain frozen for two days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for about one day, although you may be able to extend this time by grouping packages together so they retain the cold more effectively.

You also can help keep food frozen longer by adding dry ice to your freezer when the power goes off. Twenty-five pounds of dry ice should hold a full 10-cubic-foot freezer below freezing for three to four days. If the freezer is half full,

the same amount of dry ice will keep it stable for two to three days.

"If possible, find out where you can get dry ice before you need it," said Kantor. "Utility companies sometimes distribute dry ice free of charge during extended power outages. Listen to radio announcements (on a battery-powered radio) regarding distribution points. You can also check the yellow pages in the phone book for dry ice suppliers."

If you do purchase dry ice, make sure you handle it properly.

"Never touch it with your bare hands," Kantor said. "It can freeze your skin quite badly. Instead, transport it in a cardboard box that you can place directly in the freezer, or wear heavy gloves and use tongs when handling it. Keep the dry ice away from food items or place a piece of cardboard between the ice and food so items don't stick to it."

When dry ice vaporizes, it drives out the surrounding oxygen, so don't stick your head into the freezer and breathe vapors.

After a power failure, food will usually keep for four to six hours in a refrigerator, depending on how warm your kitchen is. If power will be out for longer than that, you may want to add block ice to the refrigerator. Don't use dry ice — it can freeze refrigerator items.

You can help insulate your refrigerator and/or freezer by covering it with a blanket, which will help prevent the loss of cold air. Just make sure you don't cover the air vents in case the power comes back on.

Once power has been restored, it's time to assess the damage. The following guidelines will help you decide which items to keep and which to throw out.

If ice crystals are visible on

frozen food and its temperature has remained at 40 F or below, it is safe to refreeze, although the quality of some items may suffer. If the food has thawed completely, but still feels cold, cook it right away and then serve or refreeze.

In the case of meat, Kantor recommends using it in a recipe that allows for well-done rather than rare preparation. For example, cut a roast into thin strips and stir-fry, or use ground beef for spaghetti

sauce rather than rare hamburgers.

Some foods can tolerate less time/temperature abuse than others. For example, fresh meats, poultry, lunch meats, hot dogs, eggs and milk should be discarded if they have been subjected to temperatures of 40 F or higher for more than two hours. Bacteria that cause food poisonings can multiply to unsafe levels under these conditions.

Fruits and vegetables, on the

other hand, can be cooked and served as long as there is no yeasty smell, sliminess, or evidence of mold. Juices can be used, provided they look and smell acceptable, and well-wrapped hard cheeses, butter and margarine, can be kept unless mold and rancid odors develop.

For answers to food safety questions, call your local extension home economist.

Walnut Acres Celebrates Partnership With Nature

PENNS CREEK (Snyder Co.) — If you had asked Walnut Acres founder Paul Keene half a century ago what inspired his pioneering move into organic agriculture, his answer might well have been the same as today's: "Each generation should live not as if we've borrowed it from our children." This simple quote has guided three generations of Keene family farmers.

Celebrating a golden anniversary has not slowed the drive of Paul Keene or his family as they take America's most famous organic farm into the 21st Century. This year's Summer Harvest Festival at Walnut Acres on Saturday, August 10 promises to be the biggest yet.

Walnut Acres is again teaming up with the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) to offer more seminars, field demonstrations and activities than ever before — including a special appearance by Organic Gardening Editor Mike McGrath.

The Walnut Acres story began in India in the late 1930s, when young Paul Keene met Mahatma Gandhi while working there. "It

was Gandhi's simple life, his powerful personality which inspired me to return to the states and learn organic food production," said Keene. In 1946 he and wife Betty began a farm of their own where they could live simply and apply techniques learned at an organic farming school, with a \$5,000 loan and just \$200 in cash. Walnut Acres seemed an ideal choice on the banks of the clear, pure waters of Penns Creek in picturesque Snyder County. There they began tending the soil in partnership with nature, constantly building up the fertility of the soil; always adding more than was taken away.

As the Keenes built up the soil they developed the strict program of crop rotation and natural pest control that has made Walnut Acres a model for sustainable farming. Through good and bad harvests the Keenes turned Walnut Acres into a successful working farm.

Word of Walnut Acres and their wholesome specialty foods spread as the Keenes shared their harvest. Their first food product was Apple Essence, which the Keenes prepared over an open fire. One of the highlights of the PASA Summer Harvest Festival at Walnut Acres will be a commemorative apple butter boil to recreate the magic of making that first batch of Apple Essence.

Visitors to the PASA Summer

Harvest Festival at Walnut Acres can learn to apply the principles of organic farming in their own farm and gardens as field stations demonstrate the latest in sustainable farming techniques. Experts will give seminars and tours of the Walnut Acres cannery, mill, and bakery will be given throughout the day.

A wealth of activities for the entire family will include everything from country games, music and hayrides to sheepherding and draft horse plowing demonstrations, an environmental exhibit featuring birds of prey, and an actual archeological dig for Native American artifacts. And of course there will be plenty of wholesome organic food for all to enjoy.

The Summer Harvest Festival at Walnut Acres will be held on Saturday, August 10 from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is \$5 for adults 18 and over and \$3 for ages 12-17. Children under 12 are admitted free. All admission proceeds benefit PASA.

On Friday, August 9 a bus tour will visit a nearby organic beef farm, an organic vegetable farm, and a composting operation. Advanced registration and a \$20 tour fee are required.

For more information, contact Walnut Acres at (800) 433-3998 or PASA at (814) 349-9856.



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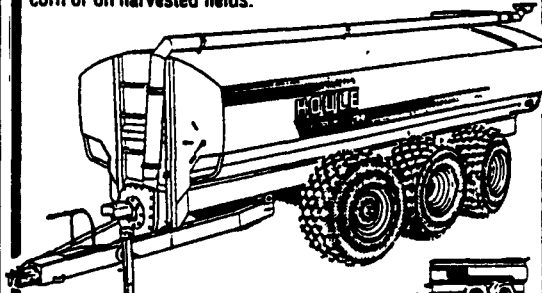
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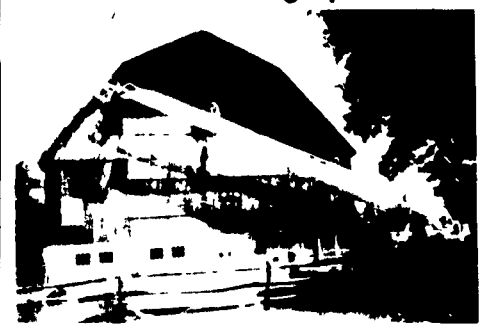
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