

Consuming Thoughts

by

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Illness caused by contaminated food is usually avoidable. How you handle and store food is a major factor in causing or preventing food poisoning especially perishable foods that you store in the refrigerator or freezer.

If you follow some simple guidelines for food storage, you can help prevent food poisoning.

It is very important that you prevent any contact between uncooked meat and poultry and other foods. Overwrap the meat package in plastic or aluminum foil before placing it in the refrigerator. Place the overwrapped package on a dish to keep the juices from dripping onto other foods.

If fresh produce touches raw meat, or the juices from raw meat or poultry. **DO NOT EAT IT!** This rule also applies to any other food that will be eaten without cooking. Food contamination commonly occurs when raw meat juices get onto ingredients used in a fresh salad.

If raw meat juices drip onto a refrigerator shelf, clean the shelf immediately. This will prevent contamination of the foods. Remember to wash your hands with soap and water before AND after wrapping food items with damaged packages. If you clean the inside of your refrigerator regularly, this will also help improve food safety. Always read food labels and refrigerate items

marked "refrigerate after opening" or "keep refrigerated." Check the expiration date on refrigerated foods, and don't eat the food after the "use by" date has passed.

Remember that you should store foods in the refrigerator only temporarily. You can mark the purchase date on the package before refrigerating it to help you remember this. If you cannot remember when a food was placed in the refrigerator, *throw it out*. Never eat foods that *might* have been in the refrigerator too long.

The temperature inside your refrigerator should always be 40°F or colder. To make sure of this, you can use a refrigerator thermometer. An inexpensive thermometer is cheap insurance against food poisoning.

If your power goes out or your refrigerator stops working, keep the door closed. If the problem continues for more than a couple of hours you should cook any raw meat or poultry right away. If you need advice on food safety in your particular situation, call the toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 or your county Cooperative Extension office.

A freezer can extend the safe storage time for most foods, but proper handling is still important. Place only fresh or freshly cooked items in the freezer, because freezing doesn't make unsafe food safe again. Frozen items don't spoil as quickly as those in the refrigerator,

but they will lose quality and flavor when they are stored too long. It is helpful to overwrap food packages in freezer wrap, freezer-quality plastic bags, or aluminum foil before placing them in the freezer.

Always place items labeled "keep frozen" in the freezer as soon as you get home from the supermarket. In hot weather, you may want to place these items in a cooler for the trip home. If frozen foods thaw and remain warm for

an hour or more during the trip home, **DO NOT** refreeze them. It is safer to discard these thawed foods.

Always keep the freezer door closed when power outage or other freezer failure occurs. If the problems last more than 24 hours, transfer the food to another freezer. Any food that can't be frozen should be thrown out or eaten right away. Meat and poultry that have not thawed completely can be refrozen, as long as ice crystals

are still present. Partly thawed fruits and vegetables will lose their texture and become mush if they are refrozen.

Following these handling and storage practices can greatly reduce your chances of food poisoning. Remember: if you have any doubt about the freshness or safety of a food item, throw it out. The cost of a single item of food cannot compare with the risk of endangering the health of your family.

Powerpay Analysis Helps Reduce Debt Payment

RUTGERS, N.J. — Are you experiencing difficulty paying credit card bills? Do you want to reduce the amount of time and money required to repay existing debts? Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County has a computer program called "PowerPay" that will calculate the fastest way to repay your creditors while paying the least amount of interest.

The principle behind PowerPay is that, as one debt is repaid, the monthly payment from that previous debt is applied to remaining creditors until all debts are repaid. Depending on the number of creditors owed and outstanding balances, the amount of money saved by following the PowerPay program can range from several hundred dollars to well over \$10,000.

With the PowerPay program, the total amount spent monthly on debt repayment remains the same. Calculations can also be done of "scenarios" with optional additional monthly payments (e.g., \$25). Persons requesting a PowerPay analysis receive a calendar indication the amount

that should be paid to each creditor until all debts are eliminated. Up to 30 separate debts can be analyzed by PowerPay.

To obtain a PowerPay analysis, contact Rutgers Cooperative Extension for a PowerPay enrollment kit. Included is a worksheet with spaces to provide information about the name of creditors, the monthly payment, the interest rate, and the outstanding balance.

The cost of a PowerPay analysis is \$2.50.

To obtain a PowerPay worksheet, send a check, made payable to the "Home Economics Council" to Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Gloucester County Office Bldg., 1200 N. Delsea Drive, Clayton, NJ 08312. For additional information about PowerPay and other Rutgers Cooperative Extension programs and services, call (609) 863-0130 weekdays during business hours.

Maryland To Hold Farm Queen Coronation

TIMONIUM, Md. — This weekend, 22 young women from across the state will vie for the title of 1997 Maryland Farm Queen at the Maryland State Fair in Timonium.

The competition on August 23 and 24, which includes formal and informal interviews, will culminate in a public contest at 7 p.m. Sunday in the fairground Cow Palace.

At this time, the young women

— each selected in a county contest earlier this year — will be asked to give a one-minute speech and answer a "fish bowl" question concerning their knowledge of agriculture and Maryland Farm Bureau policies. Each young woman is also judged on her poise, ability to speak, and her community involvement.

For more information about the contest, contact the Maryland Farm Bureau at (410) 922-3426.

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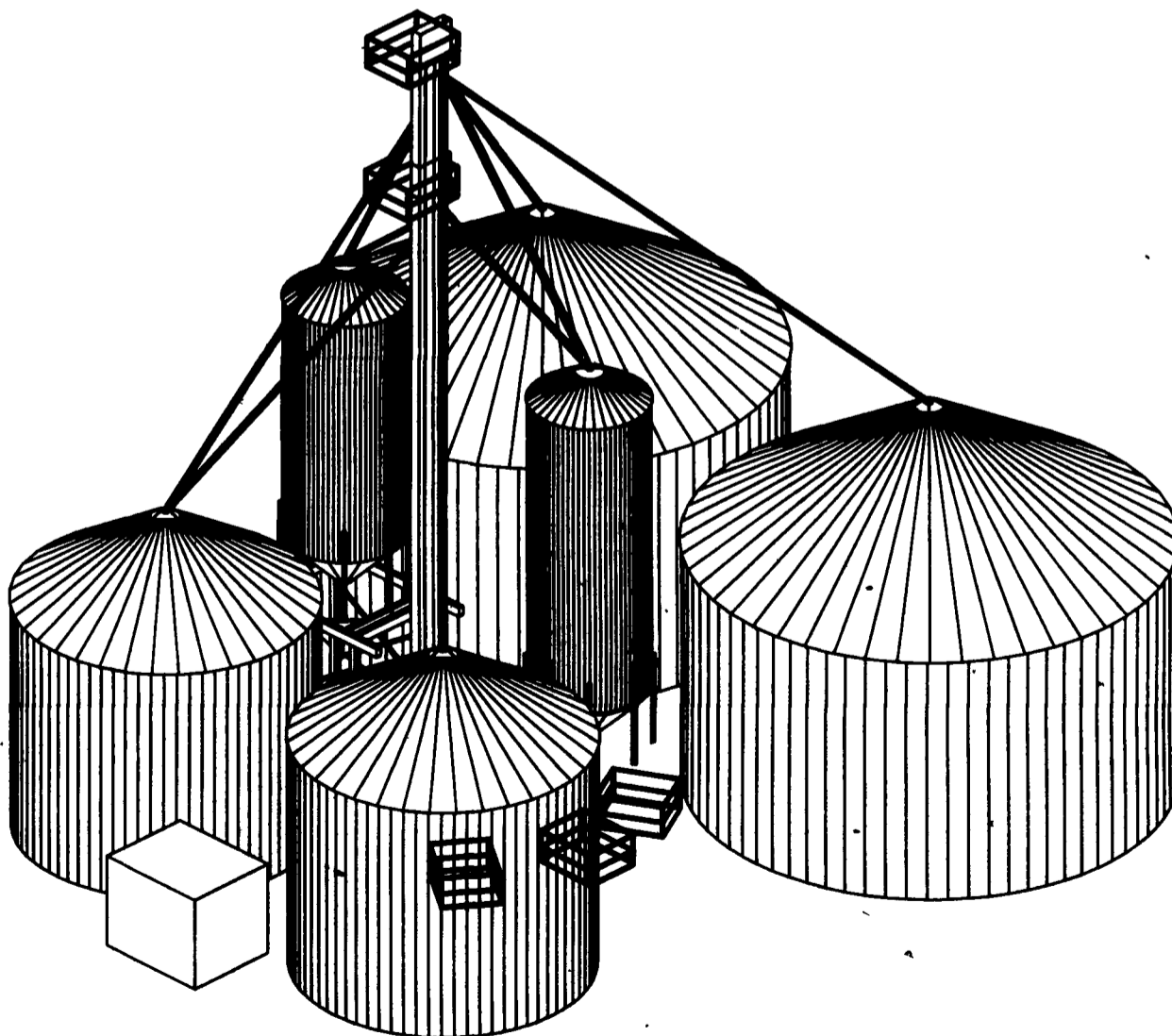
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