

Unseasonably Warm Temperatures Raise Food Safety Issues For Freshly Killed Deer

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Temperatures above 50 degrees Fahrenheit during deer season means hunters must be aware of food safety issues as they dress and transport their kill to be butchered or processed, according to a meat scientist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Hunters should get the deer out of the woods and delivered to a processor within 12 hours," said Ed Mills, associate professor of dairy and animal science. "Hunting tradition is that you bring the deer back to camp, hand it in a tree and leave it there until it's time to go home. In weather like this year, you

should get it into the cooler the same day.

"In most years, the temperatures during deer season are somewhat between 40 degrees F and freezing, which is the perfect temperature range for fresh meat refrigeration," Mills said. "On days above 50 degrees F, the temperatures inside the carcass of a deer hanging in the sun or within an unrefrigerated processing business can reach 70 or 80 degrees F."

Mills explains that any raw food commodity carries bacteria that will increase in population the longer the commodity is left unrefrigerated. In temperatures above 70 degrees F, Mills esti-

mates the amount of bacteria could double every 4 to 5 hours.

"Spoilage will give the deer meat off odors or off-flavors," Mills said. "These odors may not be apparent until the processed package is opened at a later date."

Mills advises those preparing deer meat from this season to cook it to medium-well or well done. "Deer harvested in warm temperatures," he said. "If you're following good safety practices in the kitchen when preparing game meat, you can greatly reduce your risk of getting a food-borne infection or illness."

Mills said the uncontrolled

conditions in which a deer is killed also can contribute to food safety problems. The hunter's bullet will bring bacteria from the skin into the meat as it enters a deer. A shot to the deer's gastrointestinal tract, or gut, will release millions of bacteria onto the carcass.

Mills recommends eviscerating deer as soon as they are killed, taking care not to nick or cut the gastrointestinal tract during the process. "Conditions in the woods are not very sanitary, and the person doing the

eviscerating does this once a year or probably less often, so it's important to be very careful when dressing the deer," he said.

Mills also recommends taking a deer killed during warm weather to a processing business that features a fully refrigerated processing facility where carcasses can be stored or hung in a cooler and where meat is cut and processed in a refrigerated area.

"You'll be more likely to get back a better quality product," Mills said.

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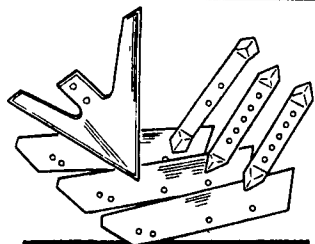
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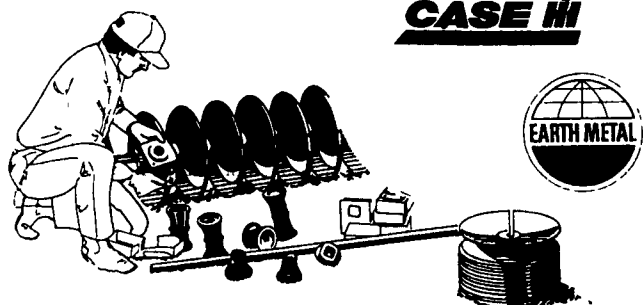
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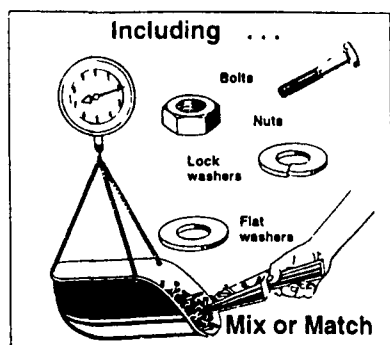
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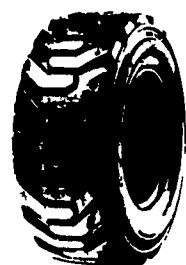
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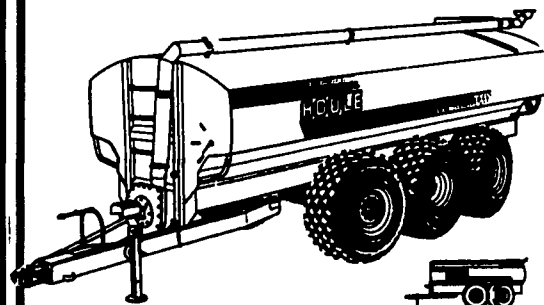
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