

**Family Living Focus**

by  
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**Buffet Bonanza: Keeping Food Safe!**

Buffets are a great way to celebrate special occasions. What could be more tempting than a buffet table laden with a mouth-watering feast? But when foods are left out at room temperature for long periods of time, buffets can provide an inviting environment for bacteria - and a food-borne illness may result. Here's how to protect the food and your guests.

**Size Matters!** If you're planning a buffet at home and are not sure how quickly the food will be eaten, keep buffet portions small. Prepare a number of small platters and dishes ahead of time. Prior to serving, store the cold

back-up dishes in the refrigerator and keep the hot dishes in the oven, set at 200 to 250 F. This way, your late-arriving guests can enjoy the same appetizing arrangements as the early arrivals.

**Take Temperatures!** Cooked, hot foods should be kept at 140 F or warmer. Use a food thermometer to check. Serve or keep food hot in chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Be aware that some warmers only hold food at 110 to 120 F, so make sure your warmer has the capability to hold foods at 140 F or warmer.

**Chill Out!** Cold foods should be kept at 40 F or colder. Keep cold foods refrigerated until serving time. If food is going to stay

out on the buffet table longer than two hours, place plates of cold food on ice to retain the chill.

**Keep it Fresh!** It can be unsafe to add new food to a serving dish that already contains food. Many people's hands may have touched the food, which has also been sitting at room temperature for awhile. Instead, replace empty platters with freshly filled ones.

**Watch the Clock!** Remember the two-hour rule: Don't leave perishable food out at room temperature on a buffet table for more than two hours unless you're keeping it hot or cold. If the buffet is held in a place where the temperature is above 90 F, the safe-holding time is reduced to one hour.

If you have any questions or concerns about food safety, contact your local county extension office or one of the following:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline (800) 535-4555; TTY number for the hearing impaired (800) 256-7072
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration Food Information Line (888) SAFE FOOD • Fight BAC! Web site at: [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org)



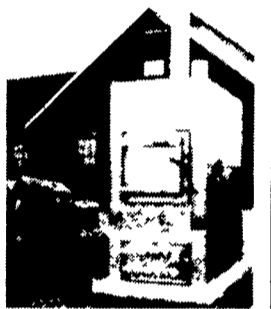
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Cedar Crest High School FFA members Amber Frank, left, and Sarah Krall stand by their second place science fair project at the National FFA Convention in Louisville, Ky.

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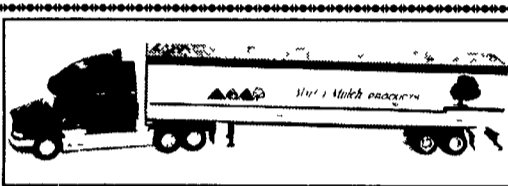
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