



Food Safety Information



Door-to-Door Meat Sales

In today's rapid pace world, shopping at home can be both convenient and timesaving. And for many older adults, stay-at-home parents, or shut-ins, it may be the only convenient way to shop. Many of these shoppers buy their groceries over the Internet. However, some consumers purchase meat and poultry from dealers who knock on their door.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) receives many complaints from consumers after purchase because the quality of the meat or poultry is not what they expected it to be. These are often not the delicious cuts of meat touted by the salesman. Unfortunately, many unhappy customers have little or no information about the door-to-door sales company, so redress is difficult or impossible.

However, if they've done their homework, consumers can be pleased with door-to-door meat and poultry sales. Before making a decision they might later regret, consumers need to find out important information about the dealer and the company.

The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline can help potential buyers do their homework by giving them tips to look for when buying meat and poultry from door-to-door salesmen. And in some instances, if the consumer has information about the company, help can be obtained after the sale as well.



Consumer Checklist

- **Check the dealer.**
- **Ask for a brochure.**
- **Read the label on the package or carton before you buy. Insist on having the establishment number where the meat or poultry was inspected.**
- **Check for grading information on the product.**
- **Understand the cuts.**
- **Ask to see a retail permit.**
- **Always check to be sure the product has been carried in a refrigerated vehicle.**

Inspection and Grading of Meat and Poultry

The Food Safety and Inspection Service carries out USDA's responsibilities under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act. These laws protect consumers by requiring the mandatory inspection of meat and poultry products to ensure they are wholesome, unadulterated, and properly marked labeled and packaged. The box or package of meat must bear the plant's inspection number.

State inspection is mandatory for meat and poultry being transported and sold within a State. The State inspection programs must enforce requirements at least equal to those of Federal inspection laws.

Quality grading of these products is voluntary. A processing plant may request to have its meat graded for quality based on traits such as tenderness. USDA grades are based on nationally uniform Federal standards of quality and are assigned by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.

For example, the highest beef grades are *Prime*, *Choice*, and *Select*. Lower grades — *Standard*, *Commercial*, *Utility*, *Cutter*, and *Canner* — are ground or used in processed meat products. The top grades for lamb and veal are *Prime*, *Choice*, and *Good*. Pork is not graded. *Grade A* is the top poultry grade.

Recommendations from the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline

Before buying meat and poultry from a door-to-door dealer, become an informed consumer by finding out important information about the company and dealer. The Hotline recommends these tips to keep in mind.

- **Check the dealer.** Ask for literature and take plenty of time to read it. If you lack the time to check into the distribution practices of the company, consider not purchasing from them.
- **Ask for a brochure.** Reputable companies will have a local sales office with a published price list that includes the address and phone number of the company. Along with the price list, they may offer recipes and nutrition information about their products.
- **Read the label on the package or carton before you buy. Insist on having the establishment number where the meat or poultry was inspected.** USDA- and State-inspected products are required to give information about the product on the label. On raw products, species, cut, net weight, ingredients statement, and safe handling statement are required. No ingredient may be added to fresh meat or poultry unless the ingredient is listed on the label. Some companies may offer less tender cuts or lower grades of meat or poultry for lower prices because the product has been tenderized with a marinade or flavoring agent. Beware of any dealer who wants you to purchase bulk quantities of meat and poultry that are not properly labeled. **Always ask the dealer to leave the box or labeling information if individual products are not labeled.**
- **Check for grading information on the product.** Companies can choose to have the meat and poultry that they sell graded by USDA. This is the only mark of identity you have for knowing the quality familiar to you. If a meat or poultry product is graded by USDA, there must be a USDA grade shield or mark on the carcass, package, or product label. Only the official USDA grade can be used as a guide to the quality of the meat.

Meat and poultry companies may label products with a company's private quality label. If a product is labeled with a term such as "restaurant quality," ask the company which USDA grade is comparable.

- **Understand the cuts.** Know which cut of meat or poultry you are buying when making a meat or poultry purchase decision. Check the label for proper identification of the cut of meat or poultry you are purchasing. For example, you don't want to pay top dollar for tenderloin and receive a cheaper cut such as a shoulder roast.
- **Ask to see a retail permit.** Remember, in most states, salespersons are required to have a State license or permit to sell products door-to-door. Ask to see the salesperson's license to sell.
- **Always check to be sure the product has been transported in a refrigerated vehicle.** Never buy meat or poultry products that are carried in an unrefrigerated truck or car trunk. The product may be unsafe because bacteria that cause illness multiply rapidly above 40 °F.
- **You have 3 days to cancel your sale.** The Federal Trade Commission Cooling-Off Rule gives you 3 days to cancel purchases that are made in your home or at a location that is not the permanent place of business or local address of the seller. The Cooling-Off Rule does not cover sales of \$25 or under. Under the rule, the salesperson must orally inform you of your cancellation rights at the time of sale. You also must be given two copies of a cancellation form and a copy of your contract or receipt. The contract or receipt should be dated, show the name and address of the seller, and explain your right to cancel. The contract or receipt must be in the same language used in the sales presentation.
- **Canceling the sale.** Remember that using a charge card does not guarantee a refund. To cancel a sale, sign and date one copy of the cancellation form. Make sure the envelope is postmarked before midnight of the third business day after the contract date. Saturday is considered a business day, but Sunday and Federal holidays are not. Because proof of the mailing date and receipt are important, consider sending the cancellation form by certified mail. Keep the other copy of the cancellation form for your records.

- ***If you have a complaint about the company.*** Try to resolve your dispute with the seller first. Make sure you act quickly. Send a letter of complaint. A letter is important because it puts your complaint on record and lets the company know you are serious about pursuing the dispute. Be sure you keep a copy for your records.
- ***In general, beware of claims that are too good to be true. They usually are.***

For Additional Help:

- Check with your State Department of Agriculture to see if the company is licensed.
- If you encounter “bait and switch” practices, contact your local or State Consumer Protection Office.
- Call your local Better Business Bureau to help you establish if you are doing business with a reputable firm or if complaints have been filed against the firm or individual.
- Obtain food safety information 24/7 in English and Spanish from our virtual representative at AskKaren.gov and PregunteleaKaren.gov. You can chat live with a food safety expert from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time year round.
- Call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). It is staffed by English- and Spanish-speaking home economists, registered dietitians, and food technologists from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time year round. An extensive selection of food safety recordings can be heard 24 hours a day using a touch-tone phone.
- Go to our website at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**. The hotline is open year-round



Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at

www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a live chat during Hotline hours.



AskKaren.gov

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