



Natural Flavorings on Meat and Poultry Labels

The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline receives many questions about natural flavorings listed on meat and poultry labels. Below are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions.

What substances or ingredients can be listed as “natural flavor,” “flavor,” or “flavorings” rather than by a specific common or usual name?

Spices (e.g., black pepper, basil, and ginger), spice extracts, essential oils, oleoresins, onion powder, garlic powder, celery powder, onion juice, and garlic juice are all ingredients that may be declared on labeling as “natural flavor,” “flavor,” or “flavoring.” Spices, oleoresins, essential oils, and spice extracts are listed in the Food and Drug Administration regulations.

Can the terms “dried meat or poultry stocks,” “dried broth,” “meat extracts,” and “dried beef plasma” be listed on meat and poultry labels as “natural flavorings”?

No. Substances derived from animal sources must be identified as to the species of origin on the label and be consistent with the definition established by Federal regulation. For example, the listing on the label would read “dried chicken stock,” “lamb extract,” or “dried beef plasma.”

If “meat extract” is added to a processed meat product for flavoring, can it be listed as “flavoring” in the ingredient statement or will it be identified as a “meat product”?

Meat extract” cannot be identified as “flavoring” in the ingredients statement. “Meat extract is defined as a meat product by Federal regulations and must always be identified by its common or usual name.

How will I know if there is monosodium glutamate (MSG) in a processed meat or poultry product?

MSG is classified as a flavor enhancer by Federal regulation. When it is added to a product, it must be identified as “monosodium glutamate” on the label.

Are MSG and hydrolyzed protein related?

Yes. MSG is the sodium salt of glutamic acid. Glutamic acid is an amino acid, one of the building blocks of protein. It is found in virtually all food and, in abundance, in food that is high in protein, including meat, poultry, cheeses, and fish.

Hydrolyzed proteins, used by the food industry to enhance flavor, are simply proteins that have been chemically broken apart into amino acids. The chemical breakdown of proteins may result in the formation of free glutamate that joins with free sodium to form MSG. In this case, the presence of MSG does not need to be disclosed on labeling. Labeling is required when MSG is added as a direct ingredient.

Can hydrolyzed animal or vegetable protein be identified as “natural flavoring” on the label?

No. FSIS regulation requires that animal or vegetable proteins must be specifically identified in the ingredient statement on the labels. The source of the protein must also be disclosed. On the label, you will read “hydrolyzed *wheat* protein” or “hydrolyzed *milk* protein,” not just hydrolyzed protein.

What Federal regulation defines what can be listed as a natural flavoring on the meat and poultry label?

On March 1, 1990, FSIS published the final rule, *Ingredients That May Be Designated as Natural Flavors, Natural Flavorings, Flavors, or Flavorings When Used in Meat or Poultry Products*. The rule did the following:

- Defined the ingredients, i.e., spices, spice extractives, and essential oils, that may be declared as “natural flavors” or “flavors” on meat and poultry labels.
- Required more specific listing of certain ingredients. Substances such as dried beef stock, autolyzed yeast, and hydrolyzed proteins must be listed on the label by their common or usual names because their purpose is not just for flavor. They are flavor enhancers, emulsifiers, stabilizers, and binders.
- Required that the specific source of hydrolyzed protein be indicated on the label, for example, “hydrolyzed soy protein” or “hydrolyzed *whey* protein.”

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.



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