

## *How Safe Is My Food??*

Denise Everson, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent  
706.769.3946 \* [deverson@uga.edu](mailto:deverson@uga.edu)

Just a week ago, the final traces of snow were melting from our homes and gardens. As families recover, we have received numerous calls about how to handle food when we lose power in our homes. While the recent power outages were directly related to extreme weather, a refrigerator or freezer may fail to function at any time of the year. It is best to decide how to handle such an emergency before it happens.

The first rule is to keep the freezer door closed. A well-filled freezer may keep foods frozen for up to two days if the door is kept closed.

If your freezer fails because of mechanical problems, consult your instruction manual for repair tips or call the repairman to service your freezer. If you will be without power for any length of time, consider moving your frozen food to a freezer that is working. Transfer the food as quickly as possible.

If you are not able to locate an available freezer, use dry ice to keep your food frozen. Always wear heavy gloves to prevent the ice from burning your hands. Ask the dry ice company to cut it into small pieces and to wrap each piece in newspaper. Put heavy cardboard on top of packages of frozen food in each compartment of your freezer and put the dry ice on top of the cardboard. Do not open the freezer again until you need to replace the dry ice or the freezer is working again.

If the temperature in your freezer stays 40°F or below, some foods may be safe to consume. Use these guidelines to help you determine whether foods should be re-frozen or discarded:

**Meat and Poultry:** Re-freeze if the freezer is 40°F or below and if color and odor are good. Discard any packages with signs of spoilage such as an off color or off odor are present.

**Vegetables:** Re-freeze if ice crystals are present or if the freezer is 40°F or below. Discard any packages that show signs of spoilage.

**Fruits:** Re-freeze if they show no signs of spoilage.

**Shellfish and Cooked Foods:** Re-freeze if ice crystals are present or the freezer is 40°F or below.

**Ice Cream:** If partially thawed, throw it out.

**Creamed Foods, Puddings and Cream Pies:** Re-freeze if temperature is 40°F or below.

**Breads, Nuts, Doughnuts, Cookies and Cakes:** These foods re-freeze better than most and can be safely re-frozen if they show no signs of mold growth.

Discard if the temperature in the freezer is above 40° F.

Be prepared and plan ahead. Locate the nearest commercial or institutional freezers, and a source of dry ice. It is good insurance to run the freezer between -10°F and -20°F, especially if you know the power will be off. The colder the food, the more slowly it thaws.

*For more information, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.*