



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## For Happy Holiday Meals: Buy Local and Practice Safe Food Handling

For Immediate Release: November 22, 2011

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**BURLINGTON** – The Vermont Department of Health and the Agency of Agriculture are encouraging Vermonters to buy local for their holiday meals, and take care to prepare foods in a way that keeps everyone safe from foodborne illness.

Hogwash Farm (Norwich, Vt.) owner Nancy LaRowe distributes a flyer with each of the 190 turkeys they sold this year that advises people to keep the poultry below 40 degrees until ready to cook.

“Be careful to thaw and store food correctly during the holidays, and practice good hygiene – keep your hands and cooking utensils clean,” said Elisabeth Wirsing, food and lodging chief at the Vermont Department of Health. “An ‘ounce of prevention’ is a good idea this time of year.”

Locally grown turkeys are often sold out well in advance of the holiday season, so it's important to put the birds in the freezer and then move them to the refrigerator for safe food handling just before they are ready to cook.



### To prevent foodborne illness:

#### Keep It Clean

Wash your hands before and after handling raw foods, and wash towels, sponges, and dish cloths often to prevent bacteria from growing. Fruit and vegetables should also be washed thoroughly.

#### Don't Cross-Contaminate

Keep raw meat, poultry, fish and their juices away from other foods. Wash your cutting board, and knives in hot soapy water after cutting raw turkey and before cutting up other ingredients. Use separate cutting boards for meats and vegetables.

#### Cook to Temperature

For whole turkeys, cook until the meat thermometer reads at least 165°F throughout the entire bird and stuffing. Bacteria can survive in poultry or stuffing that has not reached this temperature, and could cause illness like salmonella. Re-heat leftovers to 165°F. Gravy and side dishes can be sources of illness as well, so pay attention to cooking all foods properly.

#### Keep Leftovers Cold

It's best to refrigerate leftovers right away – never leave them out for more than two hours. Place leftovers in shallow storage containers to refrigerate (40°F) or freeze (0°F). After cooking, remove stuffing from poultry or other meat and refrigerate stuffing and meat separately.

#### About Defrosting

Never defrost food at room temperature. Defrosting turkeys and other large, frozen meats is especially challenging for cooks. To defrost in the refrigerator, allow 24 hours for each 5 lbs. of meat. Be sure to place a plate or container under the meat while it is defrosting, so that the juices won't contaminate other foods, and put the plate on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator.

If you need to defrost more quickly, you can use cold water. Keep the meat in its unopened wrapper and cover with cold water in a container or sink. Change the water every 30 minutes to keep the surface cold. The estimated thawing time

is 30 minutes per 1 lb. of meat.

For more information on “[Safe Food Handling for a Healthy Holiday](#)” visit the Health Department website at [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov).

For a list of Buy Local, Buy Vermont farms that sell turkeys each year, visit:  
<http://www.vermontagriculture.com/buylocal/buy/turkey.html>

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