

Meat Messenger

North Dakota State Meat Inspection Program

North Dakota Department of Agriculture

July 2005

WYNDMERE MEAT PROCESSOR NOW STATE INSPECTED

By Ted Quanrud

Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson has hailed the newest company to join the State Meat Inspection Program as “a great example for North Dakota producers of how to get involved in value-added agriculture.”

Johnson was in Wyndmere June 14 to meet with Ted Mauch and John Kuchera, owners of Bridgemart Meats.

“Ted and John have used their business expertise, as well as their experience as cattle producers, to build a new enterprise that will mean new jobs and new opportunities for the Wyndmere community,” Johnson said. “There is no reason why more stories like this can’t happen elsewhere in the state.”



Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson (center) congratulates Bridgemart Meat owners John Kuchera (left) and Ted Mauch (right) on becoming state certified.

Bridgemart Meats is the latest North Dakota meat processing operation to receive a grant of inspection from the State Meat Inspection Program. The grant allows Bridgemart to sell its products on a wholesale and retail basis anywhere in the state.

The company produces beef and pork products, including sausages, pepper sticks, jerky, hot dogs and brats. Mauch and Kuchera cut boxed meat for sale in their store.

Dr. Andrea Grondahl, director of the State Meat Inspection Program, said that Bridgemart had to pass a rigorous series of examinations and inspections to earn the grant.

The Agricultural Products Utilization Commission (APUC) provided Bridgeport with a \$20,000 grant that was used for marketing materials, labeling equipment and an illuminated sign.

Thirteen North Dakota meat processing companies are now state inspected. In addition to Bridgemart Meats, they include: Barton Meats, Carrington; Butcher Block, Oakes; DeVore Custom Meats, Steele; Edgeley Meat Processing, Edgeley; Garrison Custom Meats, Garrison; Hickory Hut, Langdon; Hope Quality Meats, Hope; L & M Meats and Sausage, Grand Forks; M & J Grocery, Wimbledon; Siouxland Buffalo, Grand Forks; Wildrose Grocery, Wildrose, and The Wurst Shop, Dickinson.

For more information on becoming state-inspected contact the Meat and Poultry Inspection Program at (701) 328-2299 or (800) 242-7535.



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**The North Dakota
Department of Agriculture**

Commissioner
Roger Johnson

Program Area
Livestock Services

Program Manager
Wayne Carlson

Director of Meat Inspection
Andrea Grondahl, DVM

Senior Meat Inspector
Wawanita Best

**Compliance Officer/
Meat Inspector**
Dave Slack

Meat Inspectors
Shawn Steffen
Lexy Inghram
Heather Haugen
Kelly Ellenberg

Please address all
correspondence to:

**State Meat Inspection
North Dakota
Department of Agriculture**
600 E. Boulevard Ave., Dept. 602
Bismarck, ND 58505-0020

(701) 328-2231
(800) 242-7535
FAX: (701) 328-4567

www.agdepartment.com
ndda@state.nd.us

State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program

By Dr. Andrea Grondahl

In addition to a state meat inspection program, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) now has a state poultry inspection program. The 2003 legislature granted the NDDA authority to develop the program. Before the program could be implemented, approval had to be obtained from the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). This process has meant going through several steps and has taken several months but has finally been completed.

The addition of the poultry program translates into more opportunities for both existing and possibly new processing establishments, which will now be able to slaughter and process poultry under state inspection. Currently, there are no individuals or establishments that have requested inspection service for poultry slaughter. However, there are several state-inspected plants that plan to or have already processed poultry under state inspection. There are also seven custom exempt poultry establishments that will transfer from federal jurisdiction to the state.

State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program Expanding

By Dr. Andrea Grondahl

The 2005 State Legislature granted the North Dakota Department of Agriculture the authority to hire an additional full time employee for the meat and poultry inspection program. The additional inspector is needed to provide service to both existing state-inspected plants that have expanded their volume as well as individuals and custom establishments that have indicated their intention to become state-inspected. The new position will be based near the Jamestown area.

Food Allergens

By Institute of Food Science Technology

Food allergy is now recognised as an important food safety issue. The greatest care must be taken by food manufacturers:

- to formulate foods so as to avoid, wherever possible, inclusion of unnecessary major allergens as ingredients;
- to organise raw material supplies, production, production schedules and cleaning procedures so as to prevent cross-contamination of products by “foreign” allergens;
- to train all personnel in an understanding of necessary measures and the reasons for them;
- to provide appropriate warning, to potential purchasers, of the presence or possible presence of a major allergen in a product;
- to have in place an appropriate system for recall of any product found to be contaminated but carrying no warning.

The problem of food allergens is part of a wider problem, that of all kinds of adverse reactions to foods, which can also result from microbial and chemical food poisoning, psychological aversions and specific non-allergenic responses. Dealing with at least the major serious food allergens is an essential part of Good Manufacturing Practice.

Struggling to Label Food Allergens

By Institute of Food Technologists

New government regulations will soon require food companies to clearly label foods containing major allergens, but companies aren't sure how they will accurately accomplish this, according to experts speaking here at the annual meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists. A major problem no one yet agrees on is how to measure the amount of allergen in a food that poses a risk.

"The law is a little ahead of the science," said Kenneth J. Falci, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, about the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act. The proposed regulations direct companies to label foods that contain eight major food allergens – milk, egg, fish, crustacean shellfish, peanuts, soybeans, tree nuts, and wheat. However, the FDA has not specified at what levels in food these ingredients pose a risk.

"The immune system is incredibly complex" so these levels are unclear, said Michael Moorman, director of food safety quality for Kellogg's Company. Food companies are also uncertain about whether potential allergens used to create other ingredients need or should be included on the labels. "If companies do precautionary labeling for no reason, people won't have anything to eat," said Steve L. Taylor, Ph.D., food allergen expert with IFT and professor of food science at University of Nebraska.

There is no question that consumers are intensely interested in food allergens. Kellogg's reported that in the past decade consumers contacting the company to inquire about food allergens have risen from 6,000 in 2001 to more than 13,000 in 2004.

Moorman noted that companies need to be aware that the number of people concerned about allergies is larger than they may assume. While some studies have shown that fewer than 10 percent of Americans might have a food allergy, 29 percent of consumers check food labels for allergens. What's more, 44 percent of families with a member sensitive to allergens have changed their buying habits as a result, and 60 percent are willing to pay more for allergen-free foods.

Some practices that consumers often favor to reduce the risk of introducing allergenic materials to foods often aren't practical, said Moorman. For instance, consumers would like companies to produce allergenic on different production lines. "This won't happen," he said, "because companies rarely produce enough volume on one line and can't afford to let it sit idle."

Beware of Anthrax

By Dr. Andrea Grondahl

On July 1, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture issued a press release alerting livestock owners to the potential of Anthrax, which is caused by animals consuming the spores of the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. Recent heavy rains and flooding in much of the state has created prime conditions for Anthrax. The spores can lie dormant in the ground for decades and become vegetative under ideal soil and weather conditions. Animals then are exposed to the disease when they consume forage or water contaminated with the bacteria.

Deputy State Veterinarian Dr. Beth Carlson reported that the first anthrax cases were confirmed on July 6 in two herds in Ransom County. Since that time, additional cases of the disease have been confirmed in counties including, but not limited to, Ransom, LaMoure, Barnes, Dickey, Sargent, Traill, Grand Forks and Walsh. Anthrax-infected herds have been quarantined and are being vaccinated. Most cases have involved cattle; however, horses, bison, sheep, farmed elk and farmed deer have also been affected.

With the rise of Anthrax cases in the state, meat processors need to be vigilant for any sick or diseased livestock and must make sure only healthy carcasses are brought into facilities. Since the slaughter and processing of animals is not performed under inspection at custom plants, the health of each animal is generally assumed to be the responsibility of the owner of the livestock. However, the plant is responsible for all carcasses and products brought into the facility and for avoiding contamination of facilities. The following guidelines will help establishments avoid Anthrax within their plants:

When the animal has been slaughtered on the farm;

- Ask how the animal died. If it died other than by actual slaughter, be suspicious and ask questions. If it was slaughtered, make sure the animal was healthy. If there was something wrong with it, question the livestock owner about any symptoms and consider contacting a veterinarian.

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When the animal comes in live for slaughter;

- Be familiar with symptoms of Anthrax. The most common presentation in cattle and bison is sudden death. However, signs can be seen in live animals and include; lethargy, staggering, trouble breathing, trembling and convulsions. If you have concerns or questions, contact the state meat and poultry inspection program at (701) 328-2299 or (800) 242-7535.

All situations;

- Be aware of the time of year anthrax normally causes disease in your area (in ND it is most common in July and August).
- Be aware of the geographical location in which you live and the endemic areas of Anthrax (Anthrax is now endemic in the Sheyenne River Valley but historically, Anthrax has been found in almost every county in ND).
- Know or ask for historical data (Has the farm had infections in the past? Since Anthrax spores survive in the soil, one diagnosed case usually increases the risk for that location).

Food Product Dating

By Dr. Andrea Grondahl - taken in part from USDA

“Sell by Feb 14” is a type of information you might find on a meat or poultry product. Are dates required on food products? Does it mean the product will be unsafe to use after that date? Here is some background information which answers these and other questions about product dating.

What is Dating? “Open Dating” (use of a calendar date as opposed to a code) on a food product is a date stamped on a product’s package to help the store determine how long to display the product for sale. It can also help the purchaser to know the time limit to purchase or use the product at its best quality. It is not a safety date.

Is Dating Required by Federal Law? Except for infant formula and some baby food (see below), product dating is not required by Federal regulations. However, if a calendar date is used, it must express both the month and day of the month (and the year, in the case of shelf-stable and frozen products). If a calendar date is shown, immediately adjacent to the date must be a phrase explaining the meaning of that date such as “sell by” or “use before.” There is no uniform or universally accepted system used for food dating in the United States. Although dating of some foods is required by more than 20 states, there are areas of the country where much of the food supply has some type of open date and other areas where almost no food is dated.

Types of Dates

- A **“Sell-By”** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. The product should be purchased before the date expires.
- A **“Best if Used By (or Before)”** date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A **“Use-By”** date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- **“Closed or coded dates”** are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

Safety After Date Expires: Except for “use-by” dates, product dates don’t always refer to home storage and use after purchase. But even if the date expires during home storage, a product should be safe, wholesome and of good quality — if handled properly and kept at 40° F or below.

*North Dakota does not have any state laws requiring product dating with one exception. The Department of Health has a regulation in state food code for establishments that package food using a reduced oxygen packaging method, such as, cryovac. Establishments must limit the refrigerated shelf life to no more than fourteen calendar days from packaging to consumption or the original manufacturer’s “sell by” or “use by” date, whichever occurs first. If food establishments or manufacturers voluntarily place dating information on products, the dates may not be concealed or altered.

North Dakota Labeling Requirements for Retailers

By Dr. Andrea Grondahl

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) and the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDH) are responsible for assuring that meat and poultry products are properly labeled. North Dakota Administrative Code, Chapters 36-24 and 33-33-04, and the Code of Federal Regulations, Titles 9 (9 CFR 317) and 21 (21 CFR 101) serve as the primary regulations governing food labels.

All prepackaged meat and poultry products offered for retail sale must contain a label. All labels consist of two basic parts, the Principal Display Panel and the Information Panel.

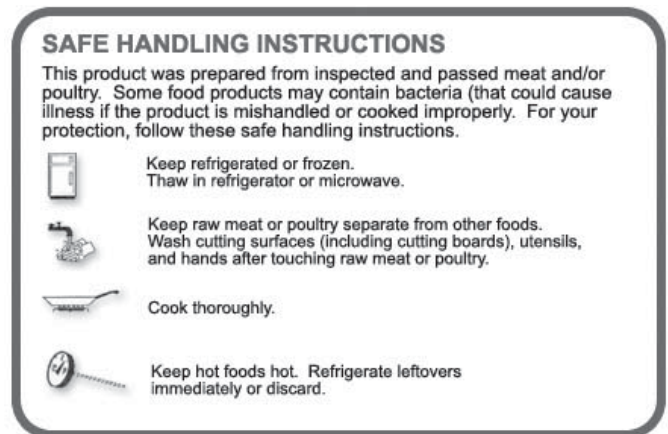
The Principal Display Panel is the part that is most likely to be viewed by the consumer. The following information is required on the Principal Display Panel:

1. **The name of the product:** This must be the common or usual name of the product. If no common or usual name exists, you need to have an appropriately descriptive phrase for the product.
2. **Statement of net weight:** The net weight should appear on the bottom 30% of the panel.
3. **Handling statement:** A handling statement, such as “keep refrigerated” or “keep frozen” is required on products which require special handling to maintain their wholesome condition.



The Information Panel is the label panel directly to the right of the Principal Display Panel. The Information Panel includes other required information that is not on the Principal Display Panel. The following information must be on either the Principal Display Panel or the Information Panel:

1. **A list of ingredients:** (if the product is made from two or more ingredients). The list must show common names of all ingredients in order of descending predominance by weight. Spices and flavorings may be declared by the generic term “spices” or “flavorings” (artificial flavorings must be identified as artificial). Preservatives must have their function declared.
2. **Name and place of business of the processor or distributor:** Labels should show the name of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor and their city, state, and zip code. If the establishment is not listed in a city directory, the street address should also be included.
3. **Safe Handling Instructions:** Safe Handling Instructions must accompany all meat and poultry products offered for retail sale, unless they have undergone further processing to render them ready-to-eat.



In addition to retail requirements, any meat or poultry product that is wholesaled or enters commerce must bear an official state or federal inspection legend. For more information on labeling requirements contact the NDDA at (701) 328-2231 or (800) 242-7535 or the Food Safety and Inspection Service at (202) 205-0279.

North Dakota's Smoke-Free Law

By Sara Wagner

On August 1, 2005, North Dakota's smoke-free law went into effect. The law prohibits smoking in all enclosed areas of public places and places of employment, with some exceptions. Cities and counties may adopt laws regulating smoking. However, these regulations must be at least as strict as the state smoke-free law.

The smoking ban includes all meat processing establishments. The only exception is businesses where the owner-operator is the only employee and the business is not commonly accessible to the public.

There is a penalty for breaking the law. A person who smokes in an area in which smoking is prohibited is guilty of an infraction. An infraction is punishable by a fine of up to \$500. To view the full text of the law, visit: www.ndtobaccoprevention.net.

You have five seconds to entice a buyer. Is your label ready for the challenge?

- Portray a professional image with the label you create.
- Brand your product and use the brand on every label and every ad.
- Communicate your consumer message through your label.
- Create a label with a target customer in mind.
- Use color to effectively create an emotion.
- Use color to stimulate appetite.
- Make your packaging and label reach beyond store shelves "clutter".
- Create a modern label.
- Use your label for all visual marketing.
- Use clean graphics and easy to read fonts.

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North Dakota Department of Agriculture
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Dept. 602
Bismarck, ND 58505-0020