

“Chilled” or “Defrosted” Meat on Display Should be Clearly Labeled

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Chicken meat is one of the daily necessities in Taiwan. In order to strengthen the management over chilled and defrosted meat, the Council of Agriculture announced that the enzyme inspection method will serve as the only inspection and certification method for this chicken meat product. Based on the guiding principle of executive synchronization, agencies such as Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Consumer Protection Committee have all come together in integrating the said inspection into legislations and regulations. The COA announced that chicken meat distributors are required to label their meat as either “chilled” or “defrosted”. From 1st March, 2014, distributors who fail to comply, or who mix the two types of meat together, would face a fine of between NT\$60,000 and NT\$1.5 million.

Since Taiwan joined the WTO, most of its imported chicken meat in markets is frozen and most of the domestic chicken is chilled. However, the lack of clear labeling to distinguish between chilled and frozen meat has resulted in some frozen meat being defrosted and sold as chilled meat, or some meat being repeatedly frozen and defrosted — which risks not only damaging the quality of the meat, but also that of people’s health. The council said that frozen meat is kept at about minus-18⁰C and sold at room temperature or on refrigerated shelves, whereas chilled meat is kept at between minus-2⁰C and 7⁰C, so the two types of meat should be labeled and kept separately.

The COA further explained that after Taiwan joined the WTO, almost all of the imported chicken meat is frozen, whereas domestically produced chicken meat is mostly chilled. However, if chilled and defrosted meat is not labeled accordingly or as in some cases, frozen meat thawed to be sold as chilled meat was not properly indicated, this would lead consumers to repeatedly freeze and thaw the meat. Not only does this cycle decrease the quality of the meat but also increase food safety risks. Moreover, according to the current food safety law, the country of origin should be clearly labeled. Since the cost of imported meat is usually lower than that of domestic meat, there is no clear distinction between thawed frozen meat and chilled meat on the market. Therefore, without precise identification and labeling, the matter might create confusion for customers and raise concerns regarding consumer deception. The Council thus listed the chilled and defrosted meat segregation as crucial work to ensure the well-being of all consumers and farmers.

The COA also pointed out that the proper core temperature for frozen chicken meat should be maintained at below -18⁰C. Meat thawed by rewarming to be sold in room temperature or refrigerator should be labeled as "unfrozen" meat. As for the refrigeration chicken meat, the core temperature should be maintained between -2 °C to 7 °C and labeled as "chilled" meat. The display area for these two types of meat must be distinctively separated to avoid mixture and confusion. The signage can be either card, tag (label), or sign (board) by posting, hanging, placing, sticking with paste, or any other form of clear identification. For tags or labels, the dimension of the words "unfrozen meat" and "refrigerated meat" should be no smaller than 6 millimeters in length and width. For the other forms of signage the measurement for each character should be larger than 2 centimeters.

(Data Source: Council of Agriculture)

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