Food safety tips as fair season approaches

K-State food safety specialist shares tips for food at the fair

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – County and state fairs are around the corner, and food is a main attraction. From vendors and trucks to projects and competitions, Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee said knowing how to prevent food safety mishaps is key.

“For any food preparation, always wash your hands before handling food,” Blakeslee said. “Use plastic gloves or utensils to handle ready-to-eat foods.”

Blakeslee recommends wearing closed toe shoes for safety in the case of accidents and securing hair with a hat or other method to keep hair out of food.

Food projects need to be safe for judges to sample, she added.

“There are several ways to check for doneness of baked goods such as the recommended baking time, color, touch, inserting a toothpick and it comes out clean, and using a food thermometer,” Blakeslee said.

Blakeslee, who is also coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center for Food Science, suggests preparing food entries early and freezing them to help save time and stress at county fairs.

“Most baked goods freeze well and can still be blue ribbon quality. This includes cookies, yeast and quick breads, and cakes,” Blakeslee said.

Additional tips for freezing food entries include:

- Bake the product as usual. Cool completely to help prevent condensation inside the wrapping and the development of ice crystals.

- Use moisture-vapor resistant packaging. This includes freezer-safe plastic containers or bags, heavy-duty aluminum foil, and rigid containers.
Separate layers of cookies with wax paper or parchment paper.

If a cake or bread is to be frosted, freeze the product only and frost after it is thawed.

When preparing pies, Blakeslee suggests making pie crusts ahead of time and freezing them.

“Freezing whole prepared pies can cause the filling to soak into the crust,” she said.

When the time comes to thaw the product, thaw all baked goods in the freezer packaging.

“They can be thawed at room temperature. Remove from the freezer the night before the fair. Once thawed, repackaging into the proper packaging according to your fair rules,” Blakeslee said.

Signage at the fair is also important when preventing food safety hazards.

“There have been foodborne illness outbreaks traced back to fairs in the past. If handling animals, washing hands is very important before handling or eating food because of the chance of contamination from E. coli bacteria,” Blakeslee said.

She suggests using signage to help remind fair-goers of simple tips for food safety.

“It’s a joint effort between the fair organizers and fair-goers to make the effort to prepare, serve and consume safe food,” Blakeslee said.

Blakeslee publishes a monthly newsletter called You Asked It! that provides numerous tips on food safety. More information is also available from local extension offices in Kansas.

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Rapid Response Center, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu
You Asked It! newsletter, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/newsletter/index.html
K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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