

Boxed Beef Safe Handling and Freezing Tips

Cue the Ideas to Manage Inventory While Serving Safe Products

A Chef's Perspective for Foodservice Operators

Cargill Chef Pete Geoghegan Weighs In



First and foremost, freezing is not your enemy. You can rely on freezing to control cost and manage aging of your beef. You will always lose some moisture (purge) during the freezing/thawing process, but if done correctly the loss will be minimal. On whole muscle cuts, you will gain some tenderness during this process.”



Freezing Pros

More Tender
Cost and age control



Freezing Cons

Moisture Loss
(minimal 2 – 3% if using our tips for success below)

Freezing Tips: A variety of suggestions to fit your operations...



Good Practice:

Muscle Cuts and Grinds: Remove the sub-primals and/or Grinds from the box and lay them out on wire racks/shelves to get as much air circulation as possible so they freeze quicker.



Better Practice:

Muscle Cuts: Break the beef down into usable portions, individually wrap each portion with plastic wrap, then place a few of the portions into a sealable freezer plastic bag (make sure you remove as much air as possible before sealing) and freeze.

Grinds: Do the same for grinds, remembering to flatten it out as much as possible for freezing and thawing efficiencies.



Best Practice

Muscle Cuts: Break the beef down into usable portions, vacuum seal the portions and then freeze.

Grinds: Place grinds into vacuum packaging, making the package as flat as possible so it freezes quickly and thaws quickly.

***Helpful Tip:** Make sure to date and label the product before it goes into the freezer. For aging purposes, it may be helpful to label the age of the fresh product as well.

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Thawing Tips: Different suggestions for different operations and/or capabilities...



Good Practice *(only if you have no other option)*

Remove the meat from the freezer and place in sink. Fill the sink with **cold** water and let the water run slowly so there is circulation in the water. This process could take 30 minutes to many hours depending on the size of the meat that you are thawing. Your purge levels will be much higher this way, so use this method as a last resort.

***Very important to clean and sanitize the sink afterwards!**



Best Practice

Remove the Beef from the freezer and place in the refrigerator on a wire rack/shelf to get as much cold air circulation as possible.

***Important Note:** The time it will take to freeze and thaw whole muscle cuts and grinds will depend on the size of the product. Ask your Cargill representative if you need further clarity around time requirements per cut.

Refreezing Advice: You will lose more moisture and your texture will also suffer when you refreeze beef after it has been thawed. Therefore, due to the compromised quality of the product, we do not recommend refreezing the product.

Tips for our Distributor Partners

Freezing and Thawing of Vacuum Packaged Beef (*Subprimals and Ground Beef Chubs*)

Proper freezing and thawing of products can greatly assist supply chains in maintaining product quality and safety. Below are some key points to consider if beef is to be frozen.

- **Optimal frozen storage temperature:** <math><0^{\circ}\text{F}</math>
 - **Length of time in freezer for optimal quality:** <math><1</math> year
 - **Fresh shelf life after freezing:** Fresh age basically temporarily stops while frozen and resumes once thawed. Example using Cargill's guaranteed shelf life: Boneless Vacuum Packaged Beef = 42 days fresh. If frozen at day 20, we could expect 22 days remaining life once thawed.
 - **Freezing process:** Optimal freezing would be as fast as possible. If you are freezing a few boxes they will freeze much faster and easier than a pallet of product.
 - **Thawing process:** Always thaw under refrigeration. 35-38 F recommended. Similar to freezing, a few cases is easier to thaw than a pallet and increased airflow will speed thawing. Please note that under refrigeration, it will take at least 3-5 days to fully thaw the product and times will be longer, depending upon spacing.
 - **Food safety implications:** No incremental issues, provided the product is stored correctly.
 - **Quality implications:** There will be increased purge on most items after thawing (approximately 2-3% more purge than normal). However, for most products, the quality will still be acceptable after proper freezing.
 - **Labeling implications:** None, unless food service establishment has menu wording such as "Fresh, never Frozen" or "Always Fresh", since the product was frozen.
- *Helpful Tip:** Make sure to mark inventory with freezing date to ensure proper shelf life.