**DATE:** May 25, 2020

**Outdoor Cooking Safety.** There are certain aromas that always signify the changing seasons, fireplaces burning, honeysuckle, fresh cut grass, and BBQ grills firing up. As we move into warmer weather and you start cooking outdoors, here are a few safety tips to keep in mind.

Before you start cooking, the safest way to thaw frozen meat is in the refrigerator. Thawing meat on the counter or in hot water can lead to foodborne illness because once items reach 40 degrees, any bacteria that may have been present are able to begin multiplying. Thawing in the refrigerator takes longer and requires advanced meal planning, creating a weekly meal plan can help. The same concept applies to marinating. You always want to marinate in the refrigerator and not on the countertop. If you are carrying meat to cook at a different location, pack it with ice packs in a cooler and only pack what you can cook and eat that day. Also remember to keep meats separate from other foods and beverages.

Washing your hands and cleaning utensils after contact with raw meat is important to minimize cross contamination. Cross contamination occurs when bacteria present on meat is transferred to other foods by hands, utensils, or surfaces. Clean all surfaces and utensils after they contact raw meat and before using them with cooked meat.

When you cook meat, use a food thermometer to make sure the internal temperature gets high enough to make it safe to eat. Beef, pork, veal, lamb, steaks, chops, and roasts are safe to eat when the internal reaches 145 degrees, fish also needs to reach 145 degrees. Ground beef should reach 160 degrees and poultry should reach 165 degrees. Using a food thermometer is a simple way to keep cooking meat safe.

If you are not eating immediately after cooking, place it on the side of the grill off the coals or in an oven set at 200 degrees to keep the meat from dropping below 140 degrees. Keeping cooked meat warm is as important as keeping raw meat cold.

As nice as it is to sit and relax after enjoying your meal, there is one more step you need to do before you can kick your feet up. Any uneaten cooked meat needs to go in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Meat left out more than two hours should be thrown away; and if the weather is warm and above 90 degrees, you have even less time. Uneaten meat in above 90-degree weather should be refrigerated within one hour.

Remembering these easy tips can help keep your outdoor summer meals safe so you can relax and enjoy the fun!

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me, (903) 473-4580 or email Sarah.Latham@ag.tamu.edu. You may also read more about this and many more topics on my blog, http://agentsarah.blogspot.com/. Follow Rains County AgriLife on Facebook for additional information and upcoming events.