

## USA – Soul Food

'Soul food' is the term used for the ethnic cuisine traditionally eaten by African Americans in the southern United States. This style of cooking originated during the time of slavery, when African slaves were given only leftovers and the parts of animals that the plantation owners didn't eat, such as pig's feet and ears, ham hocks, hog jowls, skin and intestines. Deprived of most of their native African vegetables and fruits (okra, rice, black eyed peas and watermelon being exceptions), the slaves learned to cook with the types of foods grown on the plantation or indigenous plants and animals found in the regions where they lived. Vegetables included yams, onions, cabbage and greens such as collard, mustard and turnip greens. Most slave families also received a small allotment of corn meal and sometimes sorghum.

Using these few ingredients and items such as lard, salt, garlic and whatever herbs were grown locally, slave women created a variety of delicious dishes that made their way into the mainstream of Southern cooking and exist today as regional favorites. These include fried chicken, grits, hush puppies, corn bread, bread pudding, croquettes, chow chow, fried pies and many others.

The term 'soul food' became popular in the 1960's, as the civil rights movement inspired African Americans to embrace and reclaim their ethnic heritage and culture. Along with terms like "soul music", "soul food" identifies one of the many unique contributions to American culture made by the first African Americans and their descendants.

Today, soul food restaurants can be found in every major U.S. city and anywhere else where there are sizable African American communities. What began as a means of survival became an enduring legacy passed down from generation to generation. Today it claims a respected place among America's unique and celebrated cuisines and is enjoyed by people of all ethnicities. While most of the dishes found on a soul food menu can be found in any restaurant serving traditional American fare, there are a few items with which some food inspectors may not be familiar. This section addresses those items and any regulatory concerns that may accompany them.

# **Soul Food - Oxtails**

## **Background**

Oxtails (beef or veal tail) are a popular soul food dish and are usually served as a stew or braised and served over rice with brown gravy. Oxtails are usually purchased in two forms: 1) the whole tail, which is several feet long, and 2) already cut into small portions. Most often, they come packaged in a box.

## **Preparation Procedure**

Oxtail stew ingredients may vary, but usually include onions, carrots, garlic, tomatoes and spices. Sometimes green beans, lima beans, potatoes, turnips, cabbage and other vegetables are added. The dish is slow cooked for several hours and served with rice or other vegetable side dishes.

Braised oxtails with brown gravy first involves searing the oxtails in hot oil and then boiling them, along with garlic, onions and spices for several hours until the meat is very tender. Next, the brown gravy is prepared using bacon grease, broth from the oxtails, flour and seasonings. The final step consists of placing the oxtails back in the skillet, mixing them with the gravy and cooking over low heat for several minutes.

## **Regulatory Concern – Misidentification**

Oxtails are seen primarily in Caribbean and Soul Food restaurants. Inspectors who do not have a number of these facilities in their jurisdiction might not recognize what they are and how they should be handled. Oxtails are beef and should be cooked to 145°F. Before and after cooking, they require time-temperature control for safety and should be held, stored and/or properly cooled to prevent the growth of bacteria. As is the case with any meat, oxtails must be received from an approved source. To determine whether the product is from an approved food source, check for the inspection marking from USDA or the state inspection program on the package label.

## **Control Measures**

- Recognize raw and cooked oxtails.
- Verify that it is from an approved food source through examination of packaging and invoices.
- Verify that time/temperature controls appropriate for beef are used.

# **Soul Food - Chitterlings**

## **Background**

Chitterlings are the small intestines of a pig. They can be prepared in a variety of ways. They are a popular dish in the Deep South as well as other parts of the United States. Pig intestines are also popular in many other areas of the world, including Asia, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

## **Preparation Procedure**

Chitterlings are generally pre-cleaned by the commercial food processor prior to sale. However, once received by the food establishment, additional cleaning is usually needed. Some establishments clean and wash the chitterlings numerous times in water, while others par-boil them and then clean and wash them in water before cooking. Once the chitterlings have been thoroughly cleaned, they are chopped into small pieces about an inch in length and boiled or simmered until tender, which can take from 1 to 3 hours. They are then seasoned with a variety of ingredients, depending on the establishment. Typical ingredients include salt, onion, celery, garlic, red pepper, green pepper and/or vinegar during cooking. Once the chitterlings are tender, they are drained and served immediately, held hot, or cooled and refrigerated for later use. Other ways to prepare chitterlings include taking the tender chitterlings and sautéing them in butter, or dipping them in a flour and egg batter and deep frying them.

## **Foodborne Illness Risk Factor – Contaminated Equipment / Poor Personal Hygiene/ Improper Holding Temperatures**

### **Contaminated Equipment**

Care must be taken when preparing chitterlings, due to the prevalence of *Yersinia enterocolitica* bacteria on the product. *Yersinia enterocolitica* is of particular concern because it is not destroyed by freezing, it grows at refrigerated temperatures and the infective dose is not known. However, the pathogen is destroyed by heat and sanitizers. It is important that proper hygiene is followed to prevent employees from spreading the bacteria to other food, equipment and utensils.

### **Poor Personal Hygiene**

Cleaning raw chitterlings can transfer *Yersinia enterocolitica* bacteria to hands and surfaces throughout the kitchen. Therefore, to avoid possible contamination

of food contact surfaces and cross contamination of ready-to-eat foods, it is recommended that chitterlings be preboiled to destroy *Yersinia enterocolitica* as a first step before any cleaning or preparation takes place. If frozen, chitterlings should be thawed in the cooler and then placed into boiling water, dispersed by stirring and then brought back to a boil for 5 minutes. Preboiling for 5 minutes and then cooling before cleaning should reduce the risk of yersiniosis. Cooling may be accomplished by placing the intestines under cold running water or covering the product with ice.

### Improper Holding Temperatures

After cooking chitterlings, many establishments pour them into bus pans and store them in the cooler until needed. Because of the large quantity, proper cooling may not occur. It is recommended that the establishment cool the chitterlings prior to placing them in the cooler by using an ice bath or chill stick. Another method to facilitate proper cooling of the product is to place the chitterlings in the cooler in shallow pans.

Cooked chitterlings taken directly from the refrigerator for immediate service may be reheated to any temperature as long as they have been properly cooled. However, if the chitterlings are going to be hot held, they must be reheated to 165°F and held at 135°F. If reheated in a microwave oven, the product must be covered and allowed to stand for 2 minutes after reheating.

### Control Measures

- Observe the prep procedure to confirm that chitterlings are boiled for at least 5 minutes before cleaning and washing, and that food and non-food contact surfaces contacting raw chitterlings or chitterling containers are washed, rinsed and sanitized.
- Ensure that employees that are handling chitterlings are properly cleaning hands and exposed portions of their arms, and changing outer clothing if contamination of clothing occurs.
- Verify the cooling procedure for cooked chitterlings. Chitterlings must be cooled from 135°F to 41°F within 6 hours, provided that they are cooled from 135°F to 70°F or lower in the first two hours. (Note: If chitterlings are stored in refrigerators in bus pans and large stock pots, assist the operator with proper cooling methods. Times of inspections should be varied so that cooling can be observed.)
- Confirm that chitterlings that are reheated for hot holding are reheated to 165°F within 2 hours and then held at 135°F or above.

## **Soul Food – Pig’s Feet / Neck Bones**

### **Background**

Pig’s feet and neck bones are popular dishes in soul food restaurants. The feet may be boiled, barbecued or pickled. Neck bones are usually boiled or stewed. Both are often eaten with vinegar and hot sauce.

### **Preparation Procedure**

In soul food restaurants throughout the United States, the most common way pig’s feet and neck bones are served is boiled. Both are prepared by first washing the items, bringing them to a boil and then washing them again. Next the feet or bones are boiled and then simmered for several hours with ingredients that may include onions, garlic, red peppers, and bay leaves.

### **Foodborne Illness Risk Factor - Improper Holding Temperatures**

Some food establishments have a tendency to leave pig’s feet and neck bones sitting on the stove after cooking. Unless the entire product is going to be served within four hours or less, this is not permitted. Instead, both items must be properly cooled like any other pork product. Pig’s feet are somewhat thick and may take longer to cool than other products, so strategies must be employed to cool the product within the required time limits.

If served right out of the refrigerator, pig’s feet and neck bones may be reheated to any temperature as long as they have been properly cooled. However, if they are going to be hot held, they must be reheated to 165°F before being placed on the steam table. Once on the steam table, they must be held at 135°F.

### **Regulatory Concern – Misidentification**

Pig’s feet are somewhat unusual in appearance, so it is important to be able to identify them as a pork product requiring time or temperature control for safety. Rarely is the cooking temperature an issue with pig’s feet, because for palatability the product must be cooked to a high enough temperature to soften the flesh.

Also, some inspectors may mistake neck bones in the raw state as just leftover bones with the meat removed, and not realize that they are going to be utilized by the facility.

### **Control Measures**

- Be able to recognize pig's feet and neck bones in both their raw and cooked states.
- Confirm that cooked pig's feet and neck bones are maintained at 135°F or above, or held only 4 hours and discarded using time as a public health control with the proper documentation.
- Observe the cooling procedure. Pig's feet and neck bones shall be cooled from 135°F to 41°F within 6 hours, provided that they are cooled from 135°F to 70°F within the first two hours. (Note: If the product is stored in refrigerators in bus pans and large stock pots, assist the operator with proper cooling methods if the product is being cooled in those containers. Times of inspections should be varied so that cooling can be observed.)
- Verify that pig's feet and neck bones that have been cooked and then cooled are reheated to 165°F before placing in hot holding units.

## ***Determining Approved Source*** **With Meat and Poultry Products**

Following is information that will guide you in determining whether goat, oxtails, brains, tripe and other meat and poultry products are USDA approved.

### **Inspection & Grading - What are the differences?**

The inspection and grading of meat and poultry are two separate programs within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Inspection for wholesomeness is mandatory and is paid for out of tax dollars. Grading for quality is voluntary, and the service is requested and paid for by meat and poultry producers/processors.

### **Inspection**

Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act, FSIS inspects all raw meat and poultry sold in interstate and foreign commerce, including imported products. The agency monitors meat and poultry products after they leave federally inspected plants, so you may find FSIS compliance officers in retail establishments, or be asked questions about them by retail managers.

In addition, FSIS monitors state inspection programs, which inspect meat and poultry products sold only within the state in which they were produced. The 1967 Wholesome Meat Act and the 1968 Wholesome Poultry Products Act require state inspection programs to be "at least equal to" the Federal inspection program. If states choose to end their inspection program or cannot maintain this standard, FSIS must assume responsibility for inspection within that state. There are currently 25 states and territories that allow USDA to conduct all meat and poultry inspections. They are: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands and Washington.

### **Identifying USDA Inspected Meats and Poultry**

Meat that has been federally inspected and passed for wholesomeness is stamped with a round purple mark. The firm is also allowed to use the USDA state inspection mark on labels of inspected meat or poultry in bulk containers or individual consumer-sized packages. The dye used to stamp the grade and inspection marks onto a meat carcass is made from a food-grade vegetable dye and is not harmful. The mark is put on carcasses and major cuts. After trimming it might not appear on retail cuts such as roasts and steaks. A retail food store

cannot use the USDA or state inspection marks on its labels because they are not inspected by USDA. However, meat that is packaged in an inspected facility will have an inspection mark that identifies the plant on the label. (See graphic images below.)

### Safe Handling Instructions

The requirements in the new final rule on Pathogen Reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) are designed to minimize the likelihood of harmful bacteria being present in raw meat and poultry products. However, some bacteria could be present and might become a problem if meat and poultry are not handled properly and kept refrigerated. To assist food handlers, USDA requires that safe handling instructions be put on all consumer-sized packages of raw and not fully cooked meat and poultry.



Meat







Poultry



Processed Meat Products

## Safe Handling Instructions

*This product was prepared from inspected and passed meat and/or poultry. Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.*

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|  | Keep refrigerated or frozen.<br>Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.  |
|  | Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods.<br>Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils, and hands after touching raw meat or poultry. |
|  | Cook thoroughly.  |
|  | Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.   |