

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT GROUND BEEF, HAMBURGER AND PATTIES

How is ground beef made?

When beef carcasses are cut into steaks and roasts, some smaller pieces result and are called “trimmings.” Trimmings are simply smaller cuts of beef that are various sized and resemble stew meat. Trimmings have different levels of lean content.

Trimmings are blended together in various ratios to achieve a desired lean content such as “80 percent lean/20 percent fat” or “93 percent lean/7 percent fat.” The blended trimmings are then ground to the desired texture. Many packages of ground beef indicate the ratio of lean to fat in the product. All ground meat products are required to list the fat content on the nutrition labeling panel.

Ground beef can be made by grinding a whole muscle such as a chuck roast, but trimmings containing higher levels of fat typically need to be blended in to create a product that has the characteristics of what we commonly consider ground beef. The fat content can only be adjusted by adding higher level fat trimmings, never by adding in pure beef fat. Ground beef cannot contain more than 30 percent fat.

What is hamburger?

Hamburger is a commonly used term for one of America’s favorite foods and is one of the most common menu items in America. Its menu identity involves a grilled or broiled beef burger on a bun, typically with lettuce, tomato and other toppings.

But USDA has a specific definition or “standard of identity” for the raw beef product in the grocery store labeled “hamburger.” As in ground beef production, making hamburger also involves grinding trimmings, but when making hamburger, pure beef fat may be added, with a maximum of 30 percent fat allowed.

Can anything be added to hamburger and ground beef?

No. Both hamburger and ground beef can have seasonings added, but no water, phosphates, extenders, or binders may be added. The label will indicate when seasonings are added.

What are patties?

Patties are ground beef products that are shaped into the iconic circular shape that we think of as “a burger.”

Some patties are 100 percent ground beef and other patties may be 100 percent hamburger.

“Beef patties” may also contain additional ingredients. All patties must include all ingredients on the label. Common ingredients may include binders and extenders such as soy or oat protein that help patties hold their shape and enhance eating experience. Adding binders and extenders is comparable to adding oatmeal or bread crumbs when making meatloaf or homemade patties. Some patties may have a particular seasoning or flavor such as chipotle, mushrooms, or cheese.

In addition, the regulations permit beef byproducts in patties if labeled

in the ingredient statement and included as part of the product name. If beef hearts were added, for example, the product name would be “Beef Patties with Beef Hearts”. Like many other variety meat cuts, beef hearts are wholesome and nutritious, but they are not commonly consumed by the majority of Americans and for that reason, are not commonly added to beef patties.

What are pre-cooked patties?

Some patties are cooked by the manufacturer need to be re-heated by the consumer. This is a convenient option, particularly for institutional foodservice, vending machines and for those who are enjoying a picnic or campout, where cooking and handling options may be limited.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

U.S. Department of Agriculture
www.usda.gov

USDS Meat & Poultry Hotline
1-888-MPHotline
mpholine.fsis@usda.gov