

The Food Production Chain

It takes several steps to get food from the farm or fishery to the dining table. We call these steps the food production chain (see [graphic](#)). Contamination can occur at any point along the chain—during production, processing, distribution, or preparation.

Production

Production means growing the plants we harvest or raising the animals we use for food. Most food comes from domesticated animals and plants, and their production occurs on farms or ranches. Some foods are caught or harvested from the wild, such as some fish, mushrooms, and game.



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Processing

Processing means changing plants or animals into what we recognize and buy as food. Processing involves different steps for different kinds of foods. For produce, processing can be as simple as washing and sorting, or it can involve trimming, slicing, or shredding. Milk is usually processed by pasteurizing it; sometimes it is made into cheese. Nuts may be roasted, chopped, or ground (such as with peanut butter). For animals, the first step of processing is slaughter. Meat and poultry may then be cut into pieces or ground. They may also be smoked, cooked, or frozen and may be combined with other ingredients to make a sausage or entrée, such as a potpie.



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Distribution

Distribution means getting food from the farm or processing plant to the consumer or a food service facility like a restaurant, cafeteria, or hospital kitchen. This step might involve transporting foods just once, such as trucking produce from a farm to the local farmers' market. Or it might involve many stages. For instance, frozen hamburger patties might be trucked from a meat processing plant to a large supplier, stored for a few days in the supplier's warehouse, trucked again to a local distribution facility for a restaurant chain, and finally delivered to an individual restaurant.



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Preparation

Preparation means getting the food ready to eat. This step may occur in the kitchen of a restaurant, home, or institution. It may involve following a complex recipe with many ingredients, simply heating and serving a food on a plate, or just opening a package and eating the food.



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The Food Production Chain

Everyone has a role to play in keeping food safe.



Production



Distribution Processing



Restaurant

Retail



Food service workers and customers



Home cooks and consumers



www.cdc.gov/foodsafety

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