

Food safety tips for hunters

BENJAMIN--With hunting season in full swing, the Knox County Extension Agent, Jerry Coplen, along with Texas AgriLife Extension want to share with you a few tips to keep your harvested food safe this season.

In the field:

First, never shoot, handle or consume any wild animal that appears sick. Contamination can occur at any point during the processing of wild game. Take extra time and handle carcasses with care when field dressing. Some things to consider: wear gloves when field dressing, remove all internal organs, discard any meat that is bruised, discolored, contaminated with feces or intestinal contents, contains hair, dirt or bone fragments. Remove any bloodshot areas or meat that was in contact with the bullet. Also, avoid contact with intestines, spinal tissues, and lymph nodes of animals while you work. Do not use household knives or utensils, use knives designed for field dressing. Be sure to remove all foreign particles and loose hair.

When cleaning up in the field, be sure to properly dispose of the hide and remaining parts of the animal in an offal pit or in an approved area.

Processing, storing wild game:

Be aware of cross contamination and temperature abuse, both will cause the meat to go bad. Cool carcasses quickly, keep them cool during transport and keep them out of direct sunlight. Cool the carcass by propping the chest open with a clean stick and allowing air to circulate. Thoroughly clean and sanitize all equipment used in the processing of the animal. Wash your hands, knife, cutting boards often with warm soapy water.

Packaging and storing meat is very important in the overall quality of the product. For immediate use, store meat in the refrigerator and use within a few days. If freezing, divide the meat into smaller portions and then package. It is recommended to use moisture proof wrap such as heavy wax paper, laminated freezer wrap, heavy duty aluminum foil or freezer-weight polyethylene bags for freezing meat products. Make sure to get all the air out of the packages prior to sealing them. Be sure to label the packages with contents and date.

As you can see, this can be a complex process. For more information on safe handling of wild game products, contact your local County Extension Agent, Jerry Coplen, at 940-459-2651.