

Opinion 06-2022 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on the sales period of minced meat and meat preparations made from minced meat

Background & terms of reference

The royal decree of 13 July 2014 on the hygiene of food stipulates that the maximum sales period of minced meat and meat preparations based on minced meat in the Business to Consumer (B2C) sector is 48 hours after production at the level of the retail establishment. Since this legislation is under revision, the Scientific Committee is asked, based on the results of the study project financed by FASFC and carried out by ILVO, whether there is a risk for the health of consumers when the maximum sales period for minced meat and minced meat preparations produced in retail establishments is extended from 48 hours to 72 hours with a product storage temperature of 4 °C at the operator's premises.

Method

The opinion is based on new knowledge, available scientific data, and expert opinion.

Results

The results of the study project showed that almost 20 % of the consumers are waiting for more than 2 days before consuming the minced meat or minced meat preparations. This estimate was based on a non-random sample of consumers, namely ILVO employees and other ILVO contacts, of which some are though experts in food microbiology. Analyses of samples of minced meat and minced meat preparations, which were gathered freshly prepared from butchers associated to a distribution chain as well as from independent butchers, showed high levels of smell and appearance changes following 72 hours of storage at 4 °C at the operator. The results of the "worst-case" scenarios, i.e. 72 hours of storage at 4 °C at the operator followed by 48 hours of storage at 9 °C at the consumer, showed that 90 % of the minced meat samples and 85 % of the minced meat preparation samples showed microbiological spoilage (mainly due to the proliferation of psychrotrophic lactic acid bacteria and yeasts).

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study project financed by FASFC and carried out by ILVO, the Scientific Committee considers that an extension of the sales period is not feasible. Indeed, following 72 hours of storage at 4 °C at the operator, changes in the smell and appearance of minced meat are observed (for about 40 % and 25 % of the samples respectively). For meat preparations based on minced meat, microbial spoilage can be observed (in about 30 % of the samples). The results of the "worst case" scenarios (storage of 72 hours at 4 °C at the operator followed by 48 hours at 9 °C at the consumer) showed very high spoilage rates (microbial, smell and appearance) for both minced meat (about 90 %, 80 % and 70 % respectively) and minced meat preparations (about 85 %, 60 % and 60 % respectively). In terms of quality, allowing an extension of the sell-by date is not justified.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.