

Dr. MEHREN. I would say very shortly. I would think within a matter of 1 or 2 weeks. I believe this formal interrelationship was generated by the inquiries your committee started.

TESTS ON MEAT OR POULTRY PRODUCTS RETURNED TO OFFICIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

All meat or poultry products returned to a plant operating under official USDA inspection are received at a designated location in the establishment and are given an organoleptic inspection by a USDA employee before acceptance back into the establishment. Products rejected or returned for suspected unwholesomeness are examined by selecting a sufficient number of samples from the lot to judge its condition. If such examination discloses evidence of unwholesomeness, the product is then subjected to individual examination of each unit. Also, laboratory tests are made if warranted by product conditions. If the unwholesomeness is found to be limited to a few units, a part of the lot might be salvaged and the balance condemned and destroyed for food purposes. If, however, the unwholesomeness is found to be general in nature, the entire shipment would be condemned and destroyed or diverted to nonfood uses.

SPECIFIC REJECTION CASES

Most of the USDA rejection cases on which the committee requested our appraisal on possible bacteriological, nutritional, dehydration or flavor effects describe the cause of the rejection as "temperature of commodity exceeded contract specification." In responding to this request for our appraisal on these factors, I would like to quote from an article, "Quality vs. Safety in Frozen Foods," written by Dr. R. Paul Elliott, our chief microbiologist for meat and poultry inspection:

Home freezers are not equipped with thermometers, and the consumer neither knows nor cares what the temperature of the freezer is, as long as the food remains hard. The consumer should be informed of the importance of low temperature storage.

However, in order to protect the industry, it should be made clear somehow that the question of public health is not involved.

I think the "do not refreeze" label has done just the opposite. It has instilled into the minds of the consumers, retailers, distributors, and even lawmakers, the mistaken belief that freezing a food twice makes it dangerous to eat.

When a food is thawed and refrozen, there will be a quality loss. Such loss due to one such experience may not be detectable, depending on the nature of the food. We are not recommending that you allow frozen foods to thaw and then refreeze them, because several such experiences will ruin the food from the standpoint of quality.

But this quality loss is not connected with danger to health of the consumer unless during the thawing the product temperature went to above 38° F. for at least a couple of hours, and even then only certain types of foods may be a potential danger.

Lowest recorded temperatures (° F.) for growth of food poisoning bacteria

Type:

Staphylococcus	-----	44
Salmonella	-----	44
Clostridium botulinum:	-----	44
A	-----	50
B	-----	50
C	-----	50
E	-----	38