Food Safety

What exactly is 'cook chill' and how safe is it?

Cook chill, in simple terms, is the cooking and immediate chilling of food. Almost every home in the country does some form of cook chill food, whether it be left overs, roast chicken for a salad, or soup for the freezer in winter. However, in the food service industry, cook chill generally relates to the process of:

1. Cooking the food product to the exact temperature required.
2. Stopping the cooking process by placing the product immediately into a blast chiller.
3. Cooling the product as quickly as possible.
4. Holding the product at cool temperatures (preferably below 3°C).

The cooled product can then be either served cold or reheated if required.

Cook chill has many benefits including:

- Increased shelf life.
- Improved productivity (through reduced labour costs and product wastage).
- A more consistent product.
- Food products that are safer.

I have already told you that the danger zone is between 5°C and 60°C and that the reason we cook food is to reduce the amount of bacteria to an acceptable level, however have you ever thought that as you cool the cooked product down, it has to pass straight through the danger zone again? The quicker you get the product cold the safer it is going to be, as the bacteria that is left in the food, will begin to multiply during the cooling process. At the AIFST conference in 2003, it was stated that there are four times as many food poisoning outbreaks in cook chill foods that were linked to the cooling process, than were linked to the cooking process.

Cook chill is safe, but you must cool the product down as quickly as possible. You can do this by:

- Breaking up pieces of meat into smaller pieces (such as roasts) prior to cooling.
- Spreading rice, casseroles etc. out thinly onto trays.
- Breaking large pots of soups or stocks into smaller buckets.
- Running cold water through pasta or vegetables.
- Placing large pots into sinks that are filled with cold water and ice.
- Using a frozen cool down paddle to stir soups and sauces.
- Using a blast chiller.

The AIFST have recently released a great reference book (www.aifst.asn.au) under the publication's page entitled *Cook Chill for Foodservice and Manufacturing: Guidelines for Safe Production, Storage and Distribution* it describes the process of cook chill including the time and temperature requirements needed to achieve safe food.

With cook chill anything is possible. At my wedding, all of the food was cook chill. We had roast duck with steamed rice and Asian greens, eye fillet steak, mushroom cappuccino and a seafood entrée with rainbow trout and prawns. There were many chefs in the room that couldn't believe the food was cook chill. To succeed with cook chill, you must invest in the right equipment and train your staff.

Until next edition,
Eat well. Eat safe!

Gavin Buckett
Founder and Managing Director
AGB Solutions Pty Ltd.

WIN!

Question of the Month

This "Question of the Month" was sent to me by Helen Jack, the CEO of Oasis Aged Care Inc. in Irymple, Victoria, who is the winner of a digital min/max temperature gauge with alarm, valued at $70.00. Next months prize will be a probe thermometer valued at $60.00. To contact me, go to www.gourmetguardian.com.au for your chance to learn AND win!