

Hamburgers

I can't think of another food that can evoke more emotion and bring back more instant memories than the hamburger. Though a relatively simple sandwich, the hamburger is a giant in the foodservice realm. Fortunes have been made on this humble entrée. The hamburger is a resilient product; it has crossed generation after generation without loss of momentum. In times of economic depression this is one of few commodities that increase in value. Last year, burgers and sandwiches was the only food category to show consistent growth.

What's the secret? First of all, burgers have mass appeal. They can be simple, old fashion, like we remember having as a kid, or they can be exotic using new toppings and meat varieties. They are also portable. Most importantly, they are customizable; as unique and the person who orders one.

As we enter the Memorial Day holiday (unofficial start to summer) burgers will be even more in demand. Due to seasonality, the above mentioned attributes, plus a little influence with the global economy, ground beef prices are at historically high levels. It is more important now than ever to make sure we are getting the most out of our burger dollars. Below I'll give you a quick background on the makeup of some most common types of ground beef.

Ground Round, Ground Chuck & Ground Sirloin - This product is the most straight forward and highest value. As the product states in its title, all grinds must originate from notated region: ground chuck comes from the chuck, ground round comes from the round and so on. These products have much less collagen which means they will be less likely to shrink when cooked using high heat methods (i.e. open flame grill or flat top).

Ground Beef - This product can come from any lean on the cow. It must be free of any bone matter but may contain cheek and head trimmings (cheek meat must not

exceed 25% of total lean). If head trimmings are used they are not required to be listed on the label. Cheek meat must be listed if it exceeds 2%. Due to the use of cheek and head meat, "ground beef" has a higher level of collagen thus making it more susceptible to shrinking when cooked at high temperatures. Collagen does not always shrink the shape of your product. If ground beef is cooked at a lower temperature (i.e. baking in the oven) the present collagen will relax and not pull in tight.

Pure Beef Patties & Pure Beef Patty Mix- Labeling here gets a little tricky. Do not confuse beef patties - when a beef grind is shaped into a patty, with bulk beef grinds labeled "pure beef patties" or "pure beef patty mix." The main difference between "pure beef patties" and "ground beef" is the addition of Partially Defatted Chopped Beef (PDCB). PDCB is an additional step in removing any usable lean off the bone. PDCB is a low value low cost additive, however, this is still meat protein.

Beef Patties & Beef Patty Mix- This is what I like to call everything but the kitchen sink. In "beef patties" and "beef patty mix" all of the aforementioned beef products can be used along with organ meat as well as non beef products such as Vegetable Protein Products (VPP). VPP typically is derived from soy beans. VPP does give a cooked hamburger longer holding time under heat lamps without drying out. If cheek meat, organ meat or VPP are used they must be listed on the label. It's not the most glamorous protein on the market but it definitely the highest volume beef traded. Make sure you are reading your labels and find the product that works best for your needs!

Aaron Scholl

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