

Identifying Sausages

Elizabeth Boyle, Ph.D.
Department of Animal Sciences and Industry
Kansas State University
May 1994

Many of the sausage products we enjoy today were developed originally in Europe. The kind of sausage produced by early European sausage makers was influenced by local customs, availability of spices and seasonings, and the climate of the region. Fresh and smoked sausages originated in areas having cool climates while many dry sausages were developed in warm regions. Today there are five basic classifications of sausage. These are fresh sausage, uncooked smoked sausage, cooked smoked sausage, cooked sausage and dry and semi-dry sausages.

Fresh sausages are made with uncured meat. Pork is often used to make fresh sausage although beef can be used. These sausages may be stored refrigerated for up to three days or be kept frozen. Fresh sausage must be thoroughly cooked before serving. Fresh pork sausage, Italian sausage, bratwurst and chorizo are fresh sausages commonly available at meat counters.

Uncooked smoked sausages have all of the characteristics of fresh sausage except that the sausage is smoked to impart unique flavor and color. This product may also be cured. The maximum length of time uncooked smoked sausages may be stored refrigerated is seven days. Since this product also is uncooked, it must be thoroughly heated before serving. Smoked kielbasa, a spicy coarse-ground beef and pork sausage similar to Polish sausage, is a uncooked smoked sausage.

Sausages that have been cured, smoked and cooked are classified as cooked smoked sausages. These products may have a coarse or finely ground texture and come in many shapes and sizes from large diameter products to long and narrow sausages. Once a package of cooked smoked sausages has been opened, they can usually be kept refrigerated up to seven days. Although this type of sausage is ready-to-eat (RTE), some are heated before serving. Frankfurters, bologna, cotto salami and beerwurst, a coarse-ground German-style salami made of beef and pork that is spiced with garlic, are cooked smoked sausages.

Cooked sausages may be cured or uncured, are heat processed and sometimes smoked. They often contain a variety meat or organ meat such as liver. A RTE product, cooked sausages are usually served cold and may be stored refrigerated for up to seven days after opening a package. Braunschweiger, a high quality creamy-textured liver sausage that has been smoked is classified as a cooked sausage. This sausage originated in Germany and is believed to have

been introduced in the U.S. by a Milwaukee manufacturer around 125 years ago in response to a demand for the product by German immigrants.

Dry and semi-dry sausages are cured and sometimes smoked before the sausage is dried. These sausages have a tangy flavor due to a controlled bacterial fermentation or the addition of acids. Dry sausages are dried for a longer period of time than semi-dry sausages and are generally not heat processed. Uncut dry sausages should be stored in a cool, dry place. Semi-dry sausages, such as summer sausage, are usually heat processed and should be stored refrigerated.