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### Carrying on Traditions Through Holiday Foods

Knowing this Christmas season may look a lot different from Christmas past, we may be struggling to find ways to carry on some of our traditions. Previously, I had written about simplifying our holiday festivities this year, and that may involve starting some new traditions.

Traditions help to explain our family stories. They give meaning to our family culture and explain where we came from. Those stories need to be passed on.

Our sense of smell can often bring back memories in a matter of seconds. What better way to activate our sense of smell, and recall some of those memories and stories, than with food?

Specific foods are closely tied with family traditions. Those foods, of course, will be different for each of our families. I mentioned last week that some of those favorite foods might be able to be sent through the mail to family members to help maintain some traditions this Christmas.

Keep food safety in mind when shipping homemade food gifts through the mail. Why is this an issue? Foodborne pathogens grow faster between 40°F and 140°F, potentially doubling every 20 minutes, in what is often referred to as the temperature danger zone.

Food products requiring refrigeration should be frozen solid and packed with a cold source prior to shipping. Double-check the shipping method is adequate for your gift to arrive timely, ideally overnight. Make sure the recipient knows a perishable item is coming their way, so it can go straight to the refrigerator. It's important to take the extra precautions to ensure recipients of your food package feel the love and not the effects of food poisoning when they receive their gift.

Sending only non-perishable foods through the mail is a good set of rules to follow. Non-refrigerated foods stay fresher longer and are safe at room temperature. Some examples of non-perishable foods include: Dried meats, dense and dry baked goods such as fruitcakes and biscotti. Chocolates, hard candies and homemade sweets, such as pralines and toffee, are safe to send either cold or at room temperature.

Cookies and crackers are safe to mail, but should be shipped in airtight packaging. Non-perishable ingredients that are already measured can be sent for specific food products. Food items such as cookies, hot teas or drink mixes, favorite dip mixes, and snacks, like trail mix, can easily be shipped through the mail. Don't forget to include the recipe!

While you don't need to worry about the temperature of non-refrigerated foods, you should protect the original packaging. Sturdy packaging helps keep it undamaged for the bumpy ride ahead.

If you would like to add a new twist to your holiday traditions involving food, choose one or two favorite family recipes that everyone can make. Set a time when you can meet by Zoom or some other virtual option, have the food prepared ahead of time, and let everyone enjoy that favorite dish or snack while on the virtual meeting. Conversation always goes better with food!

A virtual process of sharing foods from different locations reminds me of the progressive dinner concept that is a lot of fun. In that process, participants all enjoy the same meal, but travel from house to house to consume a different part of the meal. We may not be able to physically travel to other homes this year, but technology gives us options to still 'visit' each other's homes.

For more information on food products that ship well, contact the Southwind Extension Office in Yates Center at 620-625-8620. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.