

# MEAT MATTERS

## CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO ENHANCED MEATS



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Many fresh meat and poultry products are much leaner today than 30 years ago thanks to changes in the way animals are produced. But fat contributes flavor and moisture to products.

Enhancing meat products with certain solutions can replace the flavor and moisture loss that results from raising leaner animals or from potential overcooking. Enhancement yields more tender meat and poultry products that are juicier and easier for consumers to prepare. Without ingredients to add moisture and help the product retain it, lean products can dry out during cooking.

Pork, beef and chicken are the products most often enhanced with a solution to add moisture, flavoring or both. In 2004, enhanced products represented 21 percent of all packages in the U.S. fresh meat case. Forty-five percent of pork packages were enhanced and 10 percent had flavor solutions added. Twenty-three percent of chicken packages were enhanced and 16 percent of whole muscle cuts of beef were enhanced.

## What ingredients are added?

- ✓ Water provides moisture to help prevent the product from drying out during cooking.
- ✓ Phosphate helps the product retain moisture and protect flavor during transport, in its packaging and during cooking.
- ✓ Salt is added to enhance the flavor. (Those monitoring their sodium intake should check the nutrition label which will appear on any product that is enhanced.)
- ✓ Natural flavors or spices are added to provide specific flavors.

This process is similar to the “brining” that some consumers do at home to keep a lean piece of meat or poultry moist and flavorful. However, most consumers lack the time and desire to take these extra preparation steps at home.

## How will I know if the product has been enhanced?

Not all meat products are enhanced. But if the product has been enhanced, the federal government requires the manufacturer to include a statement on the label that clearly indicates that the product has been enhanced or that a solution has been added. These ingredients also are listed on the product label as a percentage of the total product weight.

## Don't these ingredients add to the product's weight?

Yes. The effect on the product's weight is minimal, however. Whereas water is often the first ingredient in other grocery products like salsa, soy sauce or juice, the added water and other ingredients are only a minor ingredient in meat products.

The total weight of the solution added to the product is usually no more than 10 percent. Years before enhancement became popular, consumers purchased corned beef brisket containing up to 20 percent flavoring solution. The package will state what percentage of the product's weight is due to added solution and flavoring.

## If sodium is added, will it be reflected in nutrition labels?

Yes. Any fresh meat product that includes additional ingredients—including sodium—must carry a nutrition label that reflects these ingredients.

## Is this a safe process?

All U.S. meat and poultry products must pass U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection, and enhanced products are no different. The enhancement process does not compromise the safety of these products. University-based research has shown this process to be safe when products are cooked properly.

Studies have shown that when steaks, chops and poultry are cooked to recommended degrees of doneness, these enhanced products are just as safe as non-enhanced products. In fact, some products contain ingredients that provide another layer of safety by preventing bacterial growth.

The enhancement process starts with fresh meat from a supplier that uses the best available technologies to ensure safety. The industry has developed and uses best practices for manufacturing enhanced meat and poultry that include temperature controls and sanitation guidelines to help ensure the safest product.

**Consumers expect fresh, lean meat and poultry products that are flavorful and easy to prepare. Enhancement is one way the industry helps meet that expectation.**