

## Basic Production Procedures for a Small-Scale Beef Jerky Business

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Beef jerky may be of the “restructured” type or “whole-muscle” type. Restructured jerky products may also be referred to as meat/beef sticks while whole-muscle types may be referred to as natural style or strips. The particular type of jerky will be determined by the type and quality of meat input used and the processing procedures.

Restructured jerky is normally derived from lower-value meat cuts than the whole-muscle types and undergoes a grinding process during production. Toughness of the meat is often a positive attribute to jerky products so the rounds of older, mature cows is often suitable - - if not desirable.

Meat will arrive at the jerky processing facility via a refrigerated unit in plastic bags or in larger plants in larger cardboard boxes in plastic. The meat may be obtained from a local slaughter facility, a grocery store, wholesale distributor or a national distributor. Excluding transportation costs, the value of the meat used for jerky processing will probably be around \$1.50 per pound. If obtained from a wholesale or a national distribution, the meat will likely be packed two (2) rounds per box for a total of 40 pounds.

Upon arrival to the processing facility, the meat will be placed in refrigeration. The meat will likely keep in refrigeration without spoilage for about 2 to 3 weeks.

When ready for processing the restructure-type jerky, the meat will be cut (by hand with knife) into small pieces that will fit into the mouth of the grinder. The cut pieces will be ground using course grinder plates and seasoning-mix added. The meat seasoning will be mixed to achieve uniformity. The course-ground meat will then pass back through the grinder (this time with finer plates) and then into a stuffing horn. As the meat comes out of the stuffing horn it will be placed on waxed paper, shaped, cut to length, placed on plastic trays and placed in dehydrator. Once the dehydrator is full, the meat will be dried for 8 to 10 hours.

After the dehydration process, the meat sticks will be packaged using a table-top vacuum-package machine. The plastic packaging film may be obtained from the vacuum machine company. Product labels may be crack-and-peel or pre-printed on the plastic packaging film.

A jerky recipe primarily includes meat, spice mix and water. However, the spice mix may include various ingredients such as sugar (brown and/ white), salt, vinegar, syrup, starch, various juices, nitrites, gluten and other flavorings. All of the ingredients (including the spice ingredients) must be individually listed on the product label.

A general jerky procedure might take 20 pounds of meat, combined with 10 cups of water and 40 tablespoons of spice-mix to yield 5 pounds of dehydrated beef jerky.