



Ratites Are Flightless Birds

What are Ratites?

Ratites are the family of flightless birds including the ostrich, emu, and rhea. The ostrich is native to Africa and grows to eight feet tall and 400 pounds; the emu is a native of Australia and grows to six feet tall and 140 pounds; while the rhea is native to South America and grows to five feet tall and 100 pounds. The birds are 95 percent useable as meat, feathers, oil and leather.

Are They Farmed Here?

Yes! Ratite operations, although rare, can be found in British Columbia. Most farms are breeding operations, but as the supply of birds increases more meat will be marketed.

How are They Raised?

Newly hatched ratite chicks weigh about two pounds and stand about 10 inches tall. The chicks are sheltered in a warm area for the first few weeks of life. Adolescent and adult birds roam freely in fenced pens. Daily exercise is needed to avoid leg and digestive problems.

What is the Meat Like?

Ratite meat tastes like beef but contains less fat. It is sold as steaks, fillets, medallions, roasts and ground meat. The most tender meat comes from the thigh, but meat also comes from the 'drum' and forequarter.

Are Ratites Red or White Meat?

Although ratites are poultry, the pH of the flesh is similar to beef (pH 5.1-6.2). The pH of poultry is 6.5-6.7. The ratite meat is very dark red. After cooking, the meat looks like beef and the flavour is similar but sweeter.

How is Ratite Cooked?

This is an area of confusion. Ratites are birds but the slaughtering systems are more similar to red meat animals than poultry. Therefore, the ratite meat need not be cooked at higher temperatures recommended for poultry. Instead, the USFDA Food Code, states that exotic meats be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 68°C.

Are Ratites Exempt From Meat Inspection Rules?

No! As the ratite industry in British Columbia is small, dedicated killing lines have not been created. This, however, does not mean that ratites can be killed anywhere and the meat shipped to any destination. Current meat inspection regulations and meat inspection areas apply to ratites.

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