Case Study: Food Safety

CASE STUDY NOTICE
The following case study is designed to be instructive of the issues that should generally be addressed in the situation described; they are not an exhaustive list of actions for every similar situation faced by Extension employees. The particular facts of the situation will always dictate the appropriate response. Specific questions related to a particular fact pattern should be discussed with the proper Extension administrator(s).

SITUATION:

A homeowner calls to ask what to do with meat items in her freezer. She just returned from a 5-day vacation and found the freezer no longer working. The meat was still cool to the touch, but the client was unsure about whether to refreeze or throw out the meat. Because the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent was on vacation, another person in the office advised the client that if the meat is still cool, it should be fine. The FCS agent was notified of the call after returning from vacation.

Instructions: Using the above situation, consider and discuss the following questions:
1. What is at risk for the organization and/or the individual Extension professional?
2. How would you suggest handling this situation, given the decisions that have already been made, to bring resolution?
3. How would you suggest handling this situation in the future?

Immediate response:
1. The risk for the agency is the fact that incorrect information was distributed.
2. Determine how long it has been since the incorrect advise was given and if the office staff know the identify and contact information of the homeowner (to determine the possibility of the meat products being consumed).
3. If the homeowner can be contacted, Family and Consumer Science Agent should call and recommend discarding remaining products.
5. Have discussions with office personnel about the critical nature of the call and the potential liability that is created when incorrect advice is given. (Document this discussion also).

Future solutions to situation:
- Other faculty and/or staff members who do not have the knowledge to answer such questions should defer the question until the FCS agent returns or contact the Food and Nutrition Specialist or another FCS agent.