



BTSF ACADEMY

Organisation and implementation of training activities to strengthen understanding, implementation and enforcement of EU law in the area of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards in EU Member States and neighbouring non-EU countries

STM - Microbiological shelf-life studies of ready-to-eat foods related to *Listeria monocytogenes*

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Vilnius, Lithuania. Session 1: 14-17/04/2026; Session 2: 05-08/05/2026



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2. RTE (ready-to-eat) and non-RTE foods

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STM - Microbiological shelf-life studies of ready-to-eat foods related to *L.monocytogenes*

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Vilnius, Lithuania Session 1 14-17/04/2026; Session 2 05-08/05/26

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Presentation overview

- Definition
- Decision tree
- Examples

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BTSF RTE and non-RTE food

Ready-to-eat (RTE) food is intended by the producer or manufacturer to be safe to eat without the need for further cooking or processing

Food that is under-cooked or reheated for palatability purposes only is considered RTE by default



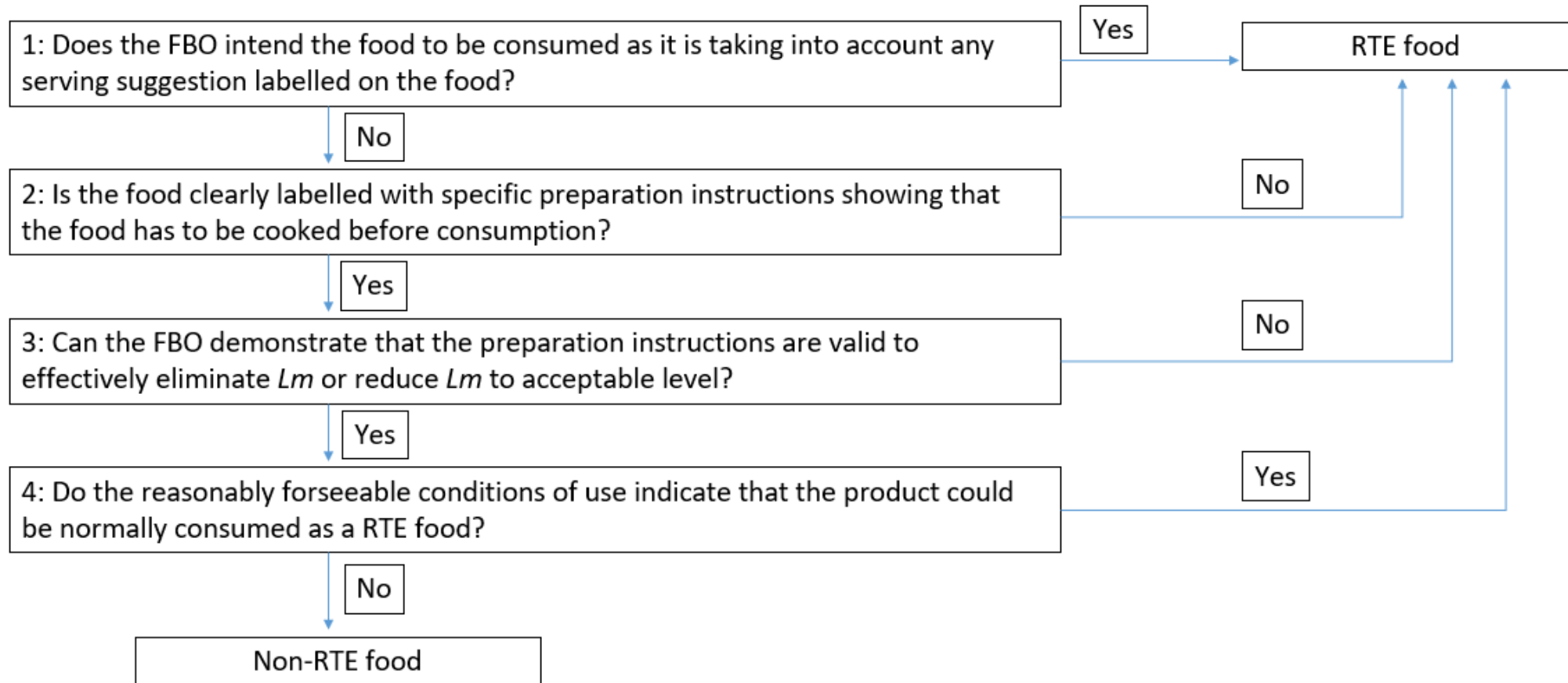
BTSF RTE and non-RTE food

Non-RTE food intended to be thoroughly cooked (to reach a core temperature of $\geq 75^{\circ}\text{C}$) or thoroughly reheated (to reach a core temperature of $\geq 70^{\circ}\text{C}$) before consumption

- Labelled with valid cooking instructions
- Serving suggestion does not indicate to eat the food without cooking



BTSF RTE or non-RTE decision tree



BTSF Examples

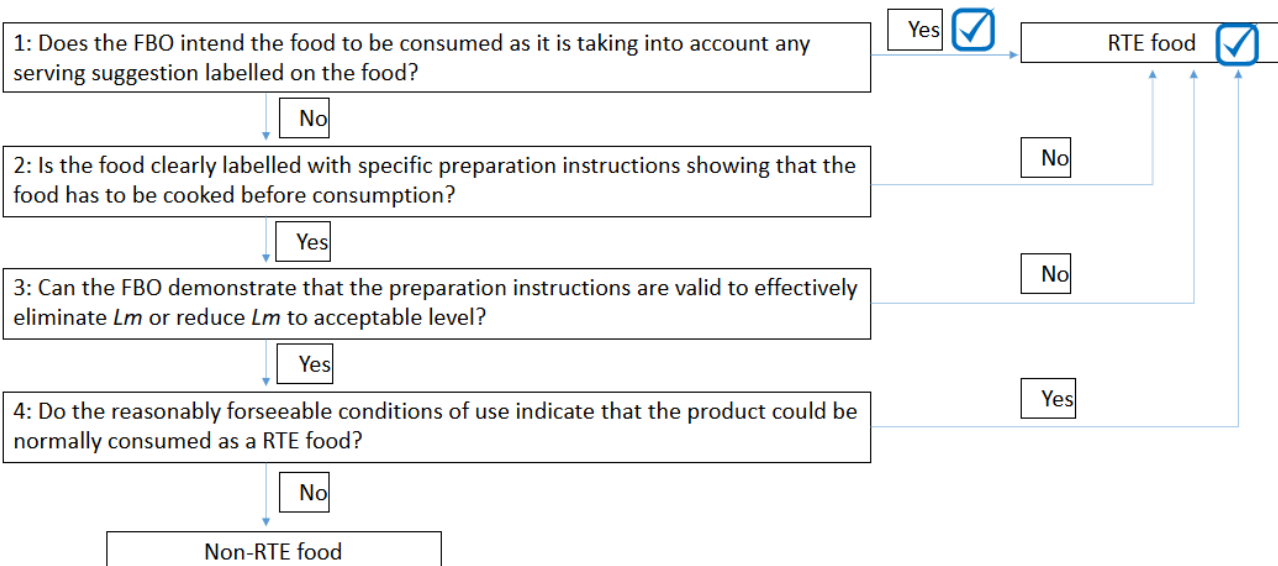


Reason why it was determined to be a RTE food:

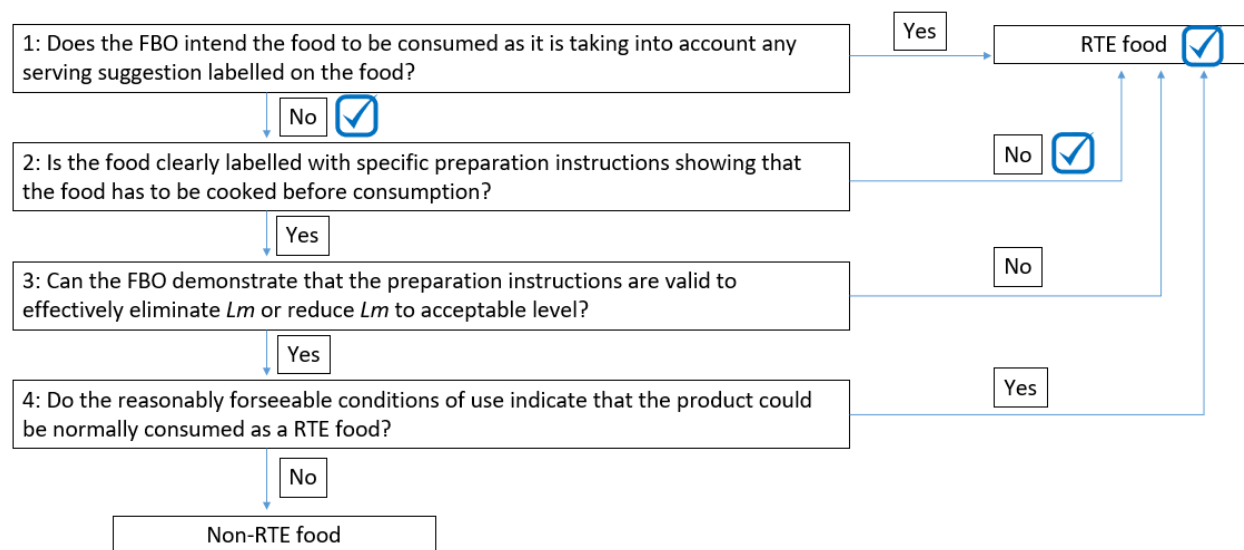
‘Yes’ was answered to Q.1 because:

- The food product is labelled with a serving suggestion that it can be eaten cold without any further heat treatment which would remove the risk of *Lm*. Although the food is also labelled with a serving suggestion that it can be consumed ‘hot in pasta dishes and quiche’, it does not influence the decision that it is a RTE food because this is an optional suggestion in addition to its use as a RTE food.
- No cooking instructions are labelled on the packaging.
- It is known that smoked salmon is often normally consumed as a RTE food without any further heat treatments.

Conclusion:
This is a RTE food.



BTSF Examples



Reason why it was determined to be a RTE food:

‘No’ was answered to Q.1 because:

- The food product is labelled with a serving suggestion to reheat thoroughly before adding as a topping to various dishes. This means the FBO does not intend the cooked bacon bits to be directly consumed as it is from the packaging without reheating first.

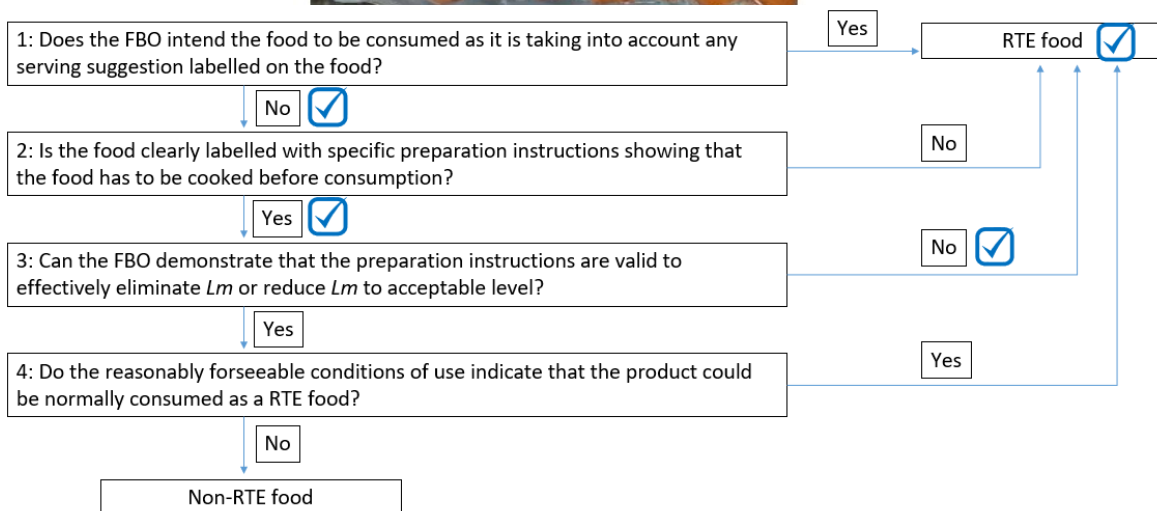
‘No’ was answered to Q.2 because:

- Some consumers may just reheat the bacon bits for palatability purposes instead of thoroughly reheating the product before consuming (e.g. to 70°C x 2 minutes) to remove the *Lm* risk due to the lack of specific preparation instructions. Some consumers may choose to eat the food cold straight from the packaging as the serving suggestion mentions using it as a topping for cold salads.
- From previous listeriosis outbreaks it is known that cooked bacon bits are often normally consumed as a RTE food without any further heat treatments (e.g. as a topping on salad).

Conclusion:

This is a RTE food.

BTSF Examples



Reason why it was determined to be a RTE food:

‘No’ was answered to Q.1 because:

- The FBO does not intend the food to be consumed as it is as a RTE food directly from the packaging.

‘Yes’ was answered to Q.2 because:

- The frankfurters are clearly labelled with cooking instructions. There is no serving suggestion to say they can be eaten without following the specific preparation instructions.

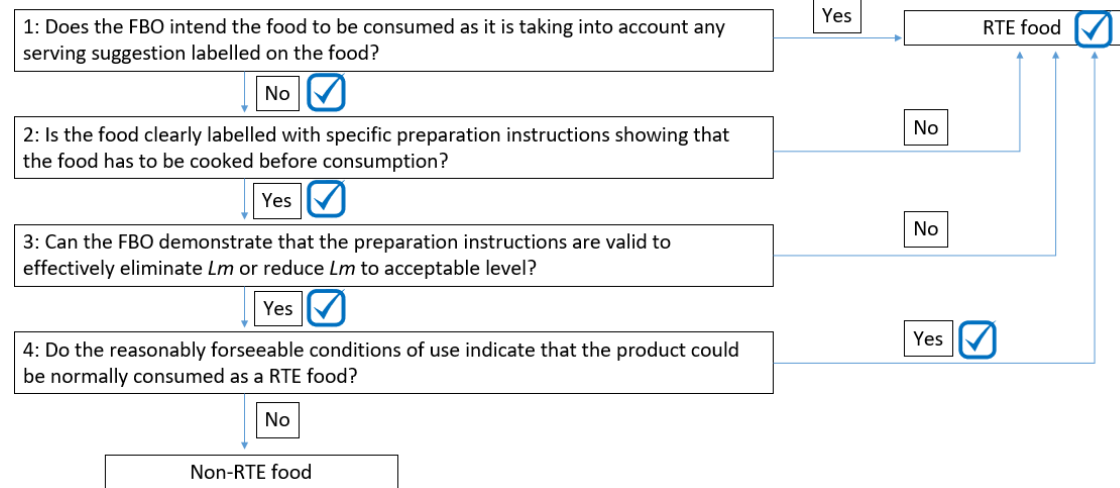
‘No’ was answered to Q.3 because:

- The FBO in this case knows it did not carry out any thermal validation studies to demonstrate the cooking instructions will remove the *Lm* risk (for example by heating the frankfurters to a core temperature of 70°C x 2 minutes).

Conclusion:

This is a RTE food.

BTSF Examples



Reason why it was determined to be a RTE food:

‘No’ was answered to Q.1 because:

- The FBO does not intend the food to be consumed as it is as a RTE food directly from the packaging.

‘Yes’ was answered to Q.2 because:

- The frozen beef burgers are clearly labelled with cooking instructions. There is no serving suggestion to say they can be eaten without following the specific preparation instructions.

‘Yes’ was answered to Q.3 because:

- The FBO in this case was known to have provided satisfactory validation evidence to its CA that shows the cooking instructions if followed exactly as labelled on packaging will remove the *Lm* risk by heating the burgers to a core temperature of 70°C x 2 minutes.

‘Yes’ was answered to Q.4 because:

- The FBO in this case exports the frozen burgers to Country X. There is evidence to show some consumers in Country X normally undercook beef burgers to their liking without strictly following the specific preparation instructions labelled on the packaging. Consumers in this country are known to often eat burgers cooked to rare or medium that are pink in the middle. Thus, this is a reasonably foreseeable condition of use for the beef burgers as a RTE food depending on the normal preparation habits of consumers in the country where it is placed on the market.

Conclusion:

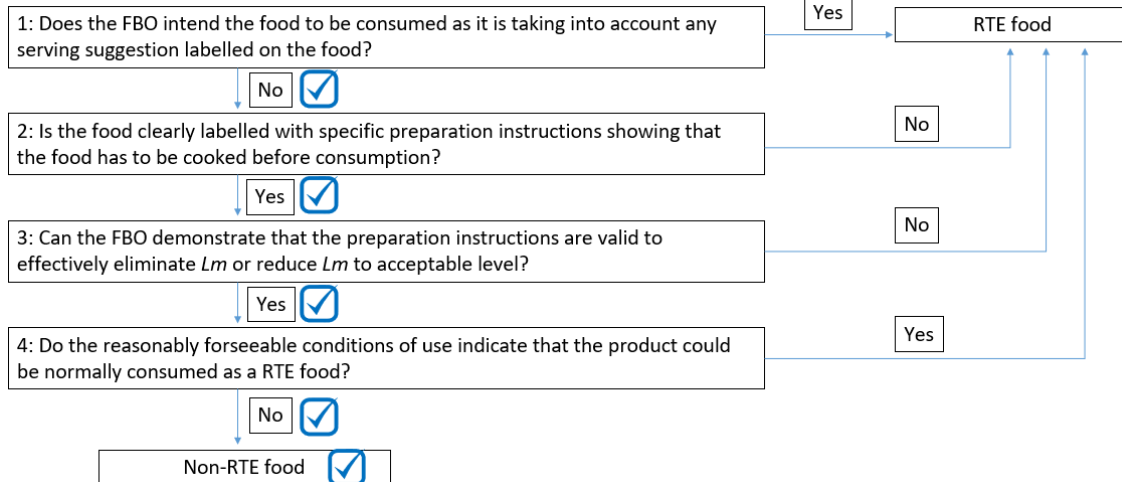
This is a RTE food.

The Pretend Burger Co.
Frozen burgers made from 100% beef

Contains 4 burgers (454g)
Best before end: Feb 2026

Cooking Instructions:
For best results always cook from frozen.
Oven: Pre-heat oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6. Place on a baking tray in the centre of oven for 25-27 minutes. Turn occasionally.
Grill: Place under a pre-heated medium grill for 18-20 minutes. Turn occasionally.

BTSF Examples



Reason why it was determined to be a non-RTE food:

‘No’ was answered to Q.1 because:

- The FBO does not intend the food to be consumed as it is as a RTE food directly from the packaging. There is no serving suggestion to say they can be eaten without following the specific preparation instructions.

‘Yes’ was answered to Q.2 because:

- The raw BBQ pork ribs are clearly labelled with cooking instructions.

‘Yes’ was answered to Q.3 because:

- The FBO has evidence to show they carried out thermal studies to validate the cooking instructions. These demonstrate that the BBQ ribs will be heated sufficiently at the core of the food (for example to 70°C x 2 minutes) to remove the *Lm* risk if the consumer follows the cooking instructions labelled on the packaging.

‘No’ was answered to Q.4 because:

- There is no evidence to show some consumers may eat the food without strictly following the specific preparation instructions (e.g. reasonably foreseeable conditions of use as a RTE food).

Conclusion:

This is a non-RTE food.

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Thank you!

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