

Sources and Resources

Natural Resources Defense Council and Harvard Food Law and Policy Center. 2013. The Dating Game: How Confusing Food Date Labels Lead to Food Waste in America.

www.nrdc.org/food/files/dating-game-report.pdf

Food Marketing Institute, Cornell University, and U.S. Department of Agricultural Food Safety and Inspection Service. 2014. The Food Keeper. 4th Edition.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline:
888-674-6854. Email: mph hotline.fsis.usda.gov

Still Tasty. www.stilltasty.com



CAPITAL AREA FOOD BANK

LOOK BEYOND THE DATE TO WASTE LESS FOOD



An estimated **40 percent** of food in the U.S. goes uneaten - enough to fill the Rose Bowl daily. This wasted food could nourish people and reduce hunger, which is why the food bank is committed to reducing food waste.

Much of this waste is due to confusion over food code dating. Food dates are voluntarily printed on food packaging by manufacturers to indicate optimal quality and freshness, and are neither required nor regulated by the federal government. These dates can include:

- **“Sell-by”**: Informs stores how long to display product for sale.
- **“Use-by”**: The last date recommended for use of product for highest quality and freshness as determined by manufacturer.
- **“Best if used by (or before)”**: Recommended for best flavor or quality
- **“Closed or coded”**: Packing numbers used by the manufacturer.

The following table provides guidance on how to use the dates on packaging. Remember, this is just a guide – it's up to you, the consumer, to use your best judgement. Many foodborne pathogens cannot be seen, tasted or smelled, so when in doubt, throw it out. **By being informed, we can waste less food and feed more of our neighbors.**

Food Coding Guidance

Food Type

**Canned Goods
- High Acid**

**Canned Goods
- Low Acid**

Dry Goods

**Frozen Meats
and Sides**

Dairy

Produce

Eggs

**Bread and
Bakery**

Examples



Guideline - Quality

**Can be consumed
12-18 months
after date**

**Can be consumed
2-5 years
after date**

**Can be consumed
1-2 years
after date**

**If frozen before or
on best-by date, safe
for consumption
indefinitely. Once
thawed, consume
within the week**

**Can be consumed
1-3 weeks
after date**

**3 days for high
perishable (berries/
mushrooms) an up to
3 months for harder
items (potatoes
winter squash)**

**Can be consumed
3-5 weeks
after date**

**Can be consumed
1-3 weeks
after date**

Guideline - Physical Condition

**Discard if heavily
dented, rusting,
punctured or
missing label**

**Discard if heavily
dented, rusting,
punctured or
missing label**

**Discard if
packaging
is ripped**

**Discard if
package is ripped
or emitting a
rancid or
foul odor**

**Discard if product
emits sour/foul odor,
appears chunky
or off-color**

**Discard if
signs of
mold/foul odor**

**Discard if
shells are cracked
or broken**

**Discard if signs
of mold growth**

* The only food item regulated by the Federal Government for safety and quality is infant formula.