Reduce Food Waste, Know Your Dates!

People often throw away food past its date because they worry about food safety; however, food package dates are not chosen based on the safety of the food.

BEST-BY-DATE, BEST-IF-USED-BY-DATE, OR USE-BY DATE

- To ensure the best quality and flavor, foods stamped with this date should be eaten before the date has passed.
- Often seen on canned foods, packages of frozen foods, and commercially prepared cereals, grains, and crackers.
- These foods can be eaten after the date has passed if they have been handled and stored properly.

SELL-BY-DATE OR PULL-BY-DATE

- Set to assure quality and inform grocery stores when they should no longer sell a food item.
- Some stores offer discounts a few days before the sell-by or pull-by date. You can get good deals, but check that the package is intact and there are no signs that the food has been mishandled. If handled and stored correctly, these foods can be eaten after the date has passed. Also, it is a good idea to use discounted food items as soon as possible. Cheap food is no bargain if it makes you or your family sick.

PACK DATE

- Manufacturers and retailers use to track inventory, rotate items, and locate items in case of a product recall. It does not inform the consumer how long the food can be stored before it is eaten.

EXPIRATION DATE

- Some foods, like eggs or yeast, can be eaten after the expiration date. The date stamped on a carton of eggs is related to the egg's grade and guarantees the egg's grade up to that date. Eggs can be consumed up to one month after the expiration date if they are safely stored. Baking with expired yeast is safe, but your bread may not rise well.
- Infant formula is the only food that should not be consumed after its expiration date. To ensure nutrient quality, regardless of the type of date noted on the package, it is recommended not to use it after that date.
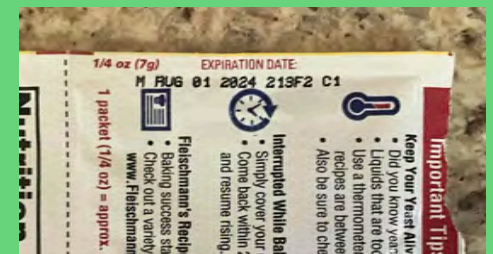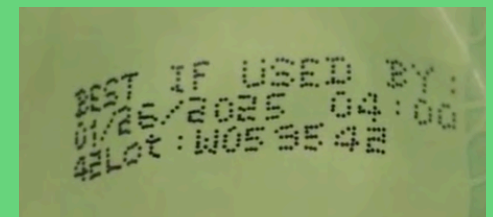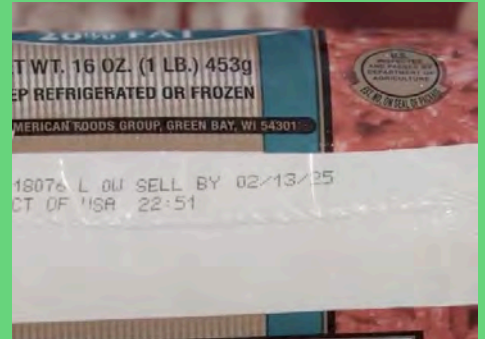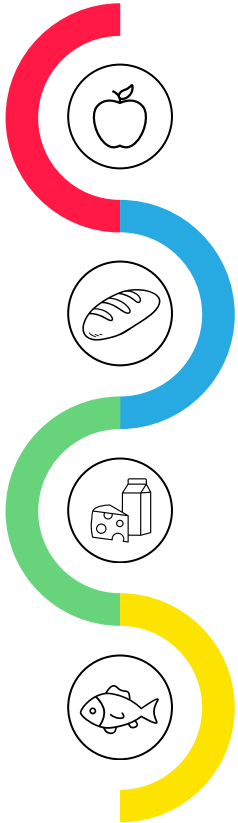
Are you interested in learning more?
Contact your local County Extension Office for more information!

At the Grocery Store

Let's visit specific grocery store sections and see how we can use the dates on food packages to get the safest and highest-quality foods

Fresh produce: Purchase only what you can use before the date stamped on foods to ensure the best quality. Leave bruised or damaged fresh fruits and vegetables at the store since they will likely spoil quickly. Fresh-cut produce, such as packaged salads, pre-cut melons, and sprouts, should be refrigerated.

Deli and prepared foods: Check that all cold items, including lunch meat, hot dogs, and deli meats, are cold and that the packages are intact. Hot food items like baked chicken should be kept hot.

Bakery and bread: Check that items are mold-free and packages have no holes or tears. Check the sell-by and best-by dates and choose a package (if possible) that will give you the most time to use the food while it is at its peak quality.

Meat and seafood: Ensure the packages have no holes or tears and the meat is stored cold. Place meat in a plastic bag and separate it from other foods in the cart so juices cannot drip onto it.

Canned and shelf-stable foods: Avoid dented, rusty, cracked, or bulging cans. Also, avoid torn packages with signs of pest infestations or water damage.

Dairy and refrigerated: Check eggs for cracks. If you open a carton and see eggs with cracks or dirt, put it back! Switching eggs from one carton to another is against food safety regulations. Also, look for juices, milk, and cheeses made with pasteurized milk

SPOILER ALERT! How do you know if food is spoiled or has gone bad? Use YOUR senses! Signs may include a change in color or texture, an unpleasant odor, or an undesirable taste.

At home, maintain proper temperatures of all appliances. Your freezer should be at 0°F or colder, and the refrigerator should be at 40°F or colder. Use an appliance thermometer to measure the temperature inside your appliances. When in doubt, throw it out. Regardless of the food label dates, spoiled food is no longer safe to eat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends following FOUR steps to ensure food is handled and stored properly and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

1) CLEAN hands, utensils, and surfaces often
2) SEPARATE foods and do not cross-contaminate.
3) COOK foods to the right temperature.
4) CHILL and freeze food properly.

We can use the dates on food labels to help you save money, prevent food waste, and ensure that the foods you serve to your family (or yourself) are of the highest quality!