

# “How About a Date?”



## *The Facts About Those Dates on Food Products, and the Disastrous Truth of America’s Food Waste Problems Caused by Those Dates*



### Leaders Guide

Designed for and Presented at the 2022 Oregon FCE State Conference  
Oregon Association for Family and Community Education  
Springfield, Oregon

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# How About a Date?

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### Outline:

- Welcome and Introduction of Presenters ..... 1 minute
  - Review Goals and Objectives (Page 2)..... 3 minutes
  - Introduction of Lesson (Page 4) ..... 1 minute
  - “How About a Date?” Quiz (Page 4 and 19 )..... 5 minutes
  - The facts about those dates on food products (Page 6) ..... 15 minutes
  - The disastrous truths of America’s food waste problems  
caused by those dates (Page 7) ..... 25 minutes
  - Conclusion, comments, questions, and Handouts (Page 18) ..... 10 minutes
- 60 total minutes**

### Goals and Objectives

- Participants will gain an understanding of where these food dates came from and what their purposes are.
- Participants will gain an understanding of the truths, myths, and misunderstandings of those food dates.
- Participants will gain an understanding of the problems and scams involved in these food dates and why they can be confusing and can cause food waste.

## Items That May Be Needed for Presentation

- ***“How About a Date? The Facts About Those Dates on Food Products and the Disastrous Truth of America’s Food Waste Problems Caused by Those Dates.*** Leaders Guide
- Various Activities and Handouts
- Pencils or pens for each attendee
- Blank paper for each attendee
- \*PowerPoint Presentation on ***“How About a Date?” The Facts About Those Dates on Food Products and the Disastrous Truth of America’s Food Waste Problems Caused by Those Dates.*** (if needed)
- \*Computer
- \*PowerPoint projector
- \*Screen or wall to project presentation on
- \*Computer/projector table
- \*Electrical cords/power bars as needed
  - \*Only needed if PowerPoint presentation is used



## References and Credit Given to:

- Hawaii FCE – Leadership Workshop, International – What do Food Expiration Dates Really Mean? July 10, 2021
- **The lie of “expired” food and the disastrous truth of America’s food waste problem** - Stop throwing your food away. - By [Alissa Wilkinson@alissamariealissa@vox.com](mailto:AlissaWilkinson@alissamariealissa@vox.com) Jul 8, 2021
- Food Safety Questions:
  - Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline toll-free at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-68
  - [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) (search food safety)

**Note to the Presenter of this Lesson: It is suggested that you read through this lesson and “Hi-Lite” the parts that you want to present and read. This lesson can be shortened or lengthened to meet various meeting times and presentations.**

**Use the PowerPoint presentation, if possible, so that all the participants can see the pictures.**

# “How About a Date?”

## *The Facts About Those Dates on Food Products and the Disastrous Truth of America’s Food Waste Problems Caused by Those Dates*

### \*\*\*\*\*Handout #1: Quiz\*\*\*\*\*

## Facts About Those Dates

### Confused by Date Labels on Packaged Foods?

- According to the FDA, Americans are throwing out about 1/3 of our food – about \$165 billion each year, as much as 20 lbs. of food per person per month
- About 20% of food waste in the home is due to consumer uncertainty about meaning of dates on labels of packaged foods
- Product dating is not required by Federal regulations, except for infant formula

### Infant Formula

- Federal regulations require a “Use-By” date on the product label of infant formula
- Consumption by this date ensures the formula contains not less than the quantity of each nutrient as described on the label
- The formula must maintain an acceptable quality to pass through an ordinary bottle nipple
- Do not buy or use baby formula after its “Use-By” date.

### Food Product Dates

- There are no uniform or universally accepted descriptions on food labels for calendar dates in the US, and as a result there are a wide variety of phrases used
- The FDA supports the food industry’s efforts to standardize “**Best if Used By**” on packaged-food labeling, if the date is related to optimal quality-not safety

- Studies have shown this best conveys to consumers these products don't have to be discarded after the date if they are stored properly
- Many food producers have adopted this change
- Part of the collaboration with the FDA, EPA, and US Department of Agriculture involves educating consumers on ways to reduce food waste and loss, and how to do it safely without risking illness from consuming spoiled food
- The most common reason manufacturers apply date labels at their own discretion is to inform consumers and retailers of the date up to which they can expect food to retain its desired quality and flavor
- Manufacturers are not required to obtain agency approval of voluntary quality-based date labels they use or specify how they arrived at the date they've noted. They are prohibited from placing false or misleading information on a label.
- Consumers should check your foods that are past their "Best if Used By" date to determine its quality. If products have changed noticeably in color, consistency, or texture, you may want to avoid eating them.
- Signs of food spoilage:
  - Smells "off"
  - Moldy
  - Different texture than what it should be
  - Unpleasant taste

### Food Product Dating – What do dates mean?

- "Sell-By" date?
- "Use-By" date?
- "Freeze-By" date?
- "Best If Used By" date?

### Examples of Common Label Phrases

- "Sell-By" date
  - Let's the store know how long to display the product for sale for inventory management
  - It is not a safety date
- "Use-By" Date
  - Last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality
  - It is not a safety date **except for when used on infant formula**



- **“Freeze-By” Date**

- When a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality
- **Not a purchase or safety date**



- **“Best if Used By/Before” date**

- Indicates when a product will be of best quality or flavor
- **It is not a purchase or safety date**
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) recommends food manufacturer and retailers use a “Best if Used By” date.
- Reduces consumer confusion and wasted food.
- This phrase conveys to consumers that the product will be of best quality if used by the calendar date shown.
- Foods not showing signs of spoilage should be wholesome and may be sold, purchased, donated, and consumed beyond the “Best if Used By” date.



### Can Codes

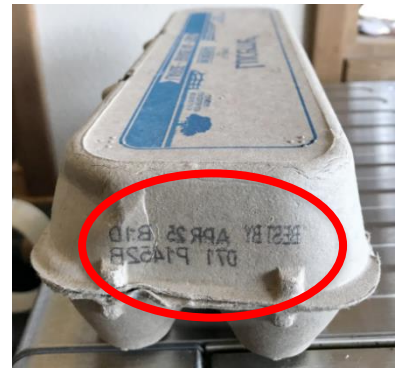
- Cans must exhibit a code or the date of canning
- Cans may also display calendar dates, usually these are “Best if Used By” dates for peak quality
- Discard cans that are dented, rusted, or swollen.
- High-acid canned foods (e.g. tomatoes and fruits) will keep their best quality for 12-18 months
- Low-acid canned foods (e.g. meats and vegetables) will keep for 2-5 years





## Dates on Egg Cartons

- Egg cartons with USDA grade shield must display the “pack date” (day eggs were washed, graded, and placed in the carton).
- It is a 3-digit code that represents the consecutive day of the year starting with January 1 as 001 and ending with December 31 as 365.
- When a “sell-by” date appears on a carton bearing the USDA grade shield, the code date may not exceed 30 days from the date of pack.
- After purchasing eggs, it is recommended to refrigerate them in their original carton and place them in the coldest area of the refrigerator, not in the door due to loss of coolness from repeated opening of the door.



## General guidelines for freshness

- These items should be safe in the fridge or pantry for the following amount of time:
  - Milk: 7 days (Tip: Keep milk in the back of the fridge, where temperature is typically coldest.)
  - Eggs: 3-5 weeks (Tip: Also store eggs in the back of the fridge, where the temperature is coldest.)
  - Ground meat/poultry: 1-2 days.
  - Cooked meat/poultry: 3-4 days.
  - Lunch meat: 2 weeks unopened, or 3-5 days opened.
  - Dry pasta: 1-2 years.
  - Steaks: 3-5 days.
  - Fresh poultry: 1-2 days.
  - Canned fruit: 12 to 18 months, or 5 to 7 days in the fridge after opening.
  - Rice and dried pasta: 2 years, or 3 to 4 days in the fridge after cooking.



## Date Labeling Impacts Food Waste

- Confusion over the meaning of dates applied to food products can result in consumers discarding wholesome food.
- Dates applied to food are for quality and not for food safety.
- Food products are safe to consume past the date on the label, and regardless of date, consumers should evaluate the quality of the food product prior to consumption.



## The Disastrous Truth of America’s Food Waste Problems Caused by Those Dates

“Stop throwing your food away!”



### The Routine

Every so often, we go through our refrigerator, check labels on the items, and throw out anything that’s a month, or a week, or maybe a few days past the date on the label.

We might stop to sniff, but for our whole adult life, we’ve figured that the problem was obvious, our jam or almond milk or package of shredded Italian cheese blend had “expired,” and the fix was simple: Into the garbage it goes.

This habit is so ingrained that when we think about eating food that’s gone past its date, we get a little queasy.

We may have only had food poisoning once or twice in our life, always from restaurants, but the idea is still there in our head: past the date, food will make you sick.



## The Statistics

We know, on some intellectual level, that throwing away food is probably wrong. The statistics are damning. Forty percent of food produced in America heads to the landfill or is otherwise wasted. That adds up. Every year, the average American family throws out somewhere between \$1,365 and \$2,275, according to a landmark 2013 study co-authored by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic and the Natural Resources Defense Council. It's a huge economic loss for food growers and retailers, who often have to ditch weirdly shaped produce or overstocked food that didn't sell.



## Bad for the Environment

Environmentally it's bad, too. The study found that 25 percent of fresh water in the US goes toward producing food that goes uneaten, and 21 percent of input to our landfills is food, which represents a per-capita increase of 50 percent since 1974. Right now, landfills are piled high with wasted food, most of which was perfectly fine to eat, — and some of which still is.

## This Food Could be Used

On top of this, the same country that throws away so much food, about 42 million people could be living with food insecurity and hunger. Yet state-level regulations often make it difficult to donate past-date food to food banks and other services. America has a food waste problem. But you've rarely been clear on how that translates to how you can actually treat the food in your refrigerator. Because what can you do, right? When the date says it's done, it's done, right?

## Expiration Dates are Not Really Expiration Dates

Apparently, very wrong. Researchers have found that "expiration" dates, which rarely correspond to food actually expiring or spoiling, are mostly well-intentioned, but haphazard and confusing. **Put another way, they're not expiration dates at all.** And the broader public's misunderstanding about them is a major contributor in every single one of the factors named above: wasted food, wasted revenue, wasted household income, and food insecurity.

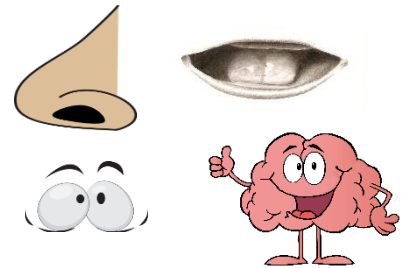


## You're Not Alone

If you've been throwing out food based on the freshness label, though, you're not alone. It's a widespread practice. Chef, journalist, and cookbook writer Tamar Adler, author of *An Everlasting Meal: Cooking with Economy and Grace*, explains: "In the absence of culinary information, people assume that any information they've been given must be the most important information." A big part of the problem is that most of us don't really believe we're capable of determining if a food is good for us.

## Your Nose, Mouth, Eyes and Brain

It's really hard to imagine you're supposed to trust your own nose, mouth, your eyes, and your brain.



## The Good News

The good news is that the problem wouldn't be all that hard to fix, in the abstract. The bad part is that solving the broader system around it takes time, education, and a shift in our consumption habits. But the incentives for virtually everyone involved are high, and a good place to start is by figuring out what those labels actually mean and how to interact with them.

## Your Assumptions are Probably Wrong

Everything you assume about date labels is probably wrong. There are two vital facts to know about date labels on foods in the US: They're not standardized, and **they have almost nothing to do with food safety.**

## Where Did Those Date Labels Come From?

Date labels first started appearing in the decades following World War II, as American consumers increasingly moved away from shopping at small grocery stores and farms and toward supermarkets, with their rows of packaged and curated options. At first, manufacturers printed a date code on cans and packages for the benefit of the grocer, so they'd have a guideline for when to rotate their stock. The label was not designed for consumers. But since shoppers wanted to buy the freshest food on the shelf, savvy folks started publishing booklets that gave a guide for deciphering the codes.

## **Those Secret Dates**

Eventually, producers, seeing that shoppers actually wanted to know what those secret dates were, started including more clearly readable dates on the packages, with month, day, and year. They saw it as a marketing boon; it was a way to attract consumers and signify that your food was fresh and flavorful. Consumers loved it, and the so-called “open date” labels became common. But there was little consistency about them.



## **Failure of the Government**

And while the federal government made some attempts beginning in the 1970s to enact legislation that would standardize what those labels mean across the country, they failed. (The exception is infant formula, for which there are strict federal guidelines.) Instead, the burden fell on state (and sometimes local) legislatures, which passed laws that varied wildly, often relying on voluntary industry standards. One state might never require labels; another may mandate that the freshness label on milk have a date of 21 days after bottling; a third may set the same date at 14 days. (In the state of New York, [there are laws about labels](#), but the standards don't mention dates at all, though certainly many manufacturers still put date labels on their products, and various municipalities at times set their own guidelines.) State-to-state discrepancies can be costly for manufacturers, who had to come up with ways to produce multiple labels for multiple regions. But it's also baffling to consumers.

## **The Labels Are Inconsistent**

The labels are inconsistent, too. What the label actually indicates varies from producer to producer. So you might have a “best by” label on one product, a “sell by” label on another, and a “best if used before” label on a third. Those have different meanings, but the average consumer may not immediately realize that, or even notice there's a difference.

## **Not Even Consistent Across the Brands**

Furthermore, those dates might not even be consistent across brands of the same food product, — peanut butter, say, or strawberry jam. That's partly because they're not really meant to indicate when a food is safest. Most packaged foods are perfectly fine for weeks or months past the date. Canned and frozen goods last for years. That package of chips you forgot about that's a month out of date isn't going to kill you, they just might be a tiny bit less crunchy than you'd like.

(The huge exception is foods like deli meats and deli salads, which won't be reheated before they're consumed and can pick up listeria in the production process, but that's the exception, not the rule.) You can check for the freshness of eggs by trying to float them in a glass of water (if it sinks, it's good). Properly pasteurized milk, which is free of pathogens, should be fine if it tastes and smells fine. But many of us, with the best of intentions, just look at what the label says and throw out what's old.

### **Is This a Scam?**

Date labeling isn't linked directly to scientifically backed safety standards, but to a more subjective, voluntary, and nebulous standard of "freshness." It will make you wonder if it was ... well, kind of a scam. After all, customers don't benefit from throwing out foods; grocers lose money; farmers miss out on possible sources of revenue. The only people who could benefit are the producers, and you could imagine an unscrupulous manufacturer shortening the date on their food so that people will sigh, throw out a half-eaten package that has "expired," and go buy some more.



### **Is There a Legitimate Reason for the Labels?**

Some manufacturers would say, "there is a legitimate reason on their part, which is that they want you to eat things when they taste the absolute best." The methods by which they determine that date can vary; a big manufacturer might run a focus group with consumers to determine the date, while a small producer may just hazard a guesstimate. But importantly, the freshness date almost never corresponds to the food's safety, to whether or not it could make you sick.

### **Protecting the Brand**

Suppose you buy a particular brand of yogurt and you wait around till it's slightly past its peak. You might decide you don't like this brand of yogurt, and buy a different one next time. The dates are, in part, a way of "protecting the brand." Their biggest incentive is to make sure you eat the food when it tastes the way they think it should.

### **Know What the Label Means**

But that doesn't mean that the way we buy and eat food has no part in the blame, and producers don't have to be insidious to be part of the issue. The fact that so many of us read a "best by" label as actually saying "bad after," is partly a public

education problem, and it's one that manufacturers haven't worked too hard to combat. It's in the general interest of anybody trying to sell anything to continue to perpetuate the illusion that our foods are going bad all the time. We could buy half as much food.

### **Just Throw it Away**

Our penchant for buying more than we need and then throwing out food that's gone slightly past its peak is rooted, at its core, in a consumer mindset. The only way that makes sense is if your cultural value is unfettered growth and profit at all costs. There's no other way that it makes sense to just throw stuff out.



### **New and Old Food**

In fact, it's in direct contrast to what most food cultures practice around the world. "The whole idea that mold and bacteria are to be avoided at all costs is not only antithetical to good cooking, but it's literally not practiced" in most cultures. Salami, and cheese, and pickles, and sauerkraut, and all kinds of food come from the natural process of aging, in most cuisines of the world, there's not as great a distinction between new food and old food; they're just ingredients that you'd use differently. Those traditions certainly have been retained in regions where Americans still make kimchi and half-sours and farm cheese. But we've absorbed over time the idea that those natural processes are bad and will make us sick. Instead, we rely on companies to tell us what food is good for us and when to get rid of it.

### **Our Shopping Culture is Also at Fault**

The problem is bigger than individual consumers. Some states bar grocery stores from donating or selling out-of-date foods to food banks and other services designed to help those living with food insecurity. The thinking is reasonable, even altruistic: Why would we give sub-par food to the "poor? If I wouldn't eat "expired" food, why would I give it to others? Distributors fear legal threats if someone eats past-dated food and becomes ill (something that has rarely happened, but it's still a looming threat).

### **The Way Americans Shop**

That's exacerbated by the way Americans shop. Think about it: How often do you see a shelf or bin or freezer in a grocery store that isn't fully stocked to the brim? Supermarkets stock more food than they can sell, and that's on purpose. It's common practice for supermarkets to plan for "shrink," — food they expect to be wasted. Shoppers in the US look askance at a shelf that isn't fully stocked, or at a few potatoes left in the bin. On the consumer side, you can understand. You want to go to a store and have them have everything you want. And if you went in and they didn't have what you want, then you'd go somewhere else. We may not even realize it, but we've trained ourselves to see full crates of beets and shelves of salad dressing as a sign that the store is good, and therefore the food in it is good. Abundance indicates quality.

### **The Mindset Leads to Waste**

But that mindset naturally, even inevitably, leads to waste. In many places, if you can't sell all your milk by the sell-by date, you have to dump it. Consumers don't want to buy a box of Cheez-Its that only has a week left on it. Beef that "expires" in two days is not going to fly off the shelves. And if you can't sell all your carrots, some of those carrots are going to start getting a little bendy. And many grocery stores will only sell produce that's up to a certain aesthetic standard, no weird-looking apples or sweet potatoes from outer space, everything the same shape and size. Furthermore, if a manufacturer changes the label on their cookie packages, all the old packages will probably just be discarded to maintain uniformity.



### **Decisions about the Food's Deliciousness or it's Healthiness**

Most of the decisions that are made about most of the foods that we eat are made for reasons that have nothing to do with the food's deliciousness or its healthiness or anything intrinsic to the food. The leaves on vegetables wilt before the stalk on the vegetable, so it's much easier for grocery stores to cut off the leaves at some point in processing. Otherwise, you have to be sprinkling and trimming them all the time. So, the perfectly edible leaves of some vegetables may get lost in the process as well, while they could have been used to feed people.



## **Ugly or Imperfect Food Stores**

Some businesses have cropped up to try to fix this larger-scale problem, like Misfits Market and Imperfect Foods. They form relationships with producers to rescue aesthetically “ugly” food, or at least, food we’ve been trained to think is ugly or too small or too large and sell it to customers. They also buy food that’s approaching its label date and resell it to customers, hoping to cut down on food waste and change the way people eat. It’s all about breaking down misconceptions. Food is not Cinderella. It’s not going to turn back into a pumpkin by midnight if it reaches the date on the label.

## **Throw Out the “Expired” and Ugly Food**

But across the country, the standard practice for your average American consumer still stands. Make a big trip to the grocery store to buy your food from the glossy displays. When food expires, throw it out. Meanwhile, farmers are plowing ugly produce back into the ground or letting it rot in the field, and stores are chucking food that’s near or past its date into the garbage because there’s nowhere else they can send it.



## **Can We Change This?**

Why doesn’t the government just fix the problem? The follow-up data to the 2013 Harvard [study](#) found that standardizing the date labeling system across the country, rather than leaving it to more local governments to address in a scattershot fashion, could be incredibly beneficial to the economy and to consumers. Enacting standardized legislation, it estimates, could prove to be an economic value of about \$1.8 billion to the US. What’s more, an estimated 398,000 tons of food waste would be diverted to actually feed people, instead of sitting in landfills.

## **Fixing it is Harder**

But fixing it has proven harder. Since the 1970s, Congress has periodically introduced legislation to modernize and standardize the system, in various forms. It can be an uphill battle. In the years since the 2013 study, many states have passed laws to try to standardize their own dates, even if they don’t align with other states. When you’re in a government that’s deregulatory, even for a good regulation, they say, ‘Let industry handle it. They have a voluntary standard, and we don’t need to step in.’

### **Congress Moves Slowly**

Furthermore, Congress just moves slowly. “They don’t have a lot of stand-alone small bills. So, the best hope that this has of getting enacted is hitching itself to a moving train. A lot of our work has been in saying, ‘Here are other bills that are moving along, like the US Farm Bill, or the Child Nutrition Act, “and here’s why date labeling fits in with them.”

### **Progress Through the Years**

Quite a bit has happened in the years. Seeing the problem, two major associations (the Consumer Brands Association and the Food Marketing Institute) put together a working group to design a standard date label that would work for both businesses and consumers. “They came up with a ‘best if used by’ label for a quality date and ‘use by’ for a safety date.” “And they got a bunch of their members to sign on to voluntarily shift to using those dates.” In other words, if a food won’t decrease in safety but might decrease in quality, the manufacturer would use the “best if used by” label; if it might become unsafe to eat, they’d use the “use by” label. That system corresponds roughly to a standard used in many other countries.

### **Easier for the Federal Government to Act**

This could make the work easier for the federal government to act. If Congress wanted to act, or the FDA or USDA wanted to act, it would be very easy to say, ‘Here’s what the standard label should be. We have some data on what works for consumers. And we know that these work for industry. But otherwise, the new label standard would be more of a “halfway solution,” since the label still will only appear on some products.

### **It’s More Than Laws. The Culture Needs to Change**

Until there’s a better solution, the best thing we can do is try to educate ourselves and change the way we shop for food.

### **First of Three Components to Improve the System**

There would be three big components to improving the system as it stands. First, the adoption of standard labels that indicate either a freshness date or a risk date would help.

### **Second of Three Components to Improve the System**

But the second part is just as important: We need a public health program to educate people about what's safe to eat. The UK has done a series of campaigns toward that end, with the slogan “**Look, Smell, Taste, Don't Waste,**” in which it partnered with industry to help people understand when to keep their food and when to toss it.

### **Third of Three Components to Improve the System**

The third component would be changing the way we allow food to be donated and distributed through food banks and other means. That requires a shift in how we think. If everyone is eating food past its “freshness” date, understanding that the food is perfectly safe but may not be at its absolute peak condition, then there will be less hesitancy about giving that food away, and less fear about the possibility of facing legal repercussions. That could have a huge impact on hunger and food insecurity in the US. “If everyone acknowledges that those foods are fine to eat, and everyone's eating them, it's not like, ‘Past-dated food is only for people who can't afford food.’ “No, we should all be eating that.”

### **We Need to Start Trusting Ourselves**

We each need to rethink how we interact with food. We need to start trusting our senses to tell us if food is edible. “Use your sense organs.” “We have them so that we can figure out whether things in the world are going to kill us, so we can make sure we're not going to poison ourselves and die, and it's even worth doing when you suspect something *is* bad, because feeling your body's response is so reassuring.”

### **We Need to Move Closer to Food**

We need to ask for more clear labels, advocate for better legislation, and talk to one another about what labels really mean. And we need to move closer to food again, thinking of it less as a packaged consumer product and more as something natural that nourishes us as humans.

**Start sniffing what's in your refrigerator before you chuck it!**

**Thank you for your time.**

# **Comments or Questions**

**Give out Handouts 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, and 3D**

## Handout #1 – How About a Date Quiz

1. (True or False) All food product dates are regulated by the USDA.
2. (True or False) Producers of food products can put different “Best By” dates on the same food produce that is being shipped to various stores.
3. (True or False) All food products past their “Best By” date must be discarded.
4. (True or False) One of the best ways to check to see if food is still good is to use your nose, eyes, mouth, and brain.
5. (True or False) Food product dates can, and do, cause a lot of food waste.
6. (True or False) Food product dates can be used as a scam by retailers to sell more food products.
7. (True or False) About 20% of food waste in the home is due to consumer uncertainty about meaning of dates on labels of packaged foods.
8. (True or False) According to the FDA, Americans are throwing out about 1/3 of our food.
9. (True or False) Infant formula product dating is regulated by the USDA.
10. (True or False) The most common reason manufacturers apply date labels at their own discretion is to inform consumers and retailers of the date up to which they can expect food to retain its desired quality and flavor.
11. (True or False) Consumers should check their foods that are past their “Best if Used By” date to determine its quality.
12. (True or False) The “Sell-By” date lets the store know how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date
13. (True or False) Cans must exhibit a code or the date of canning
14. (True or False) High-acid canned foods (e.g. tomatoes and fruits) will keep their best quality for 12-18 months
15. (True or False) Low-acid canned foods (e.g. meats and vegetables) will keep for 2-5 years
16. (True or False) Egg cartons with USDA grade shield must display the “pack date” (day eggs were washed, graded, and placed in the carton).
17. (True or False) Dry pasta can be kept fresh for 2-3 years.
18. (True or False) Canned fruit can safely be kept for 12-18 months.
19. (True or False) Food product dates were started soon after WW1.
20. (True or False) Food products are safe to consume past the date on the label, and regardless of date, but consumers should evaluate the quality of the food product prior to consumption.


## Handout #1 – How About a Date Quiz – KEY

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. True
7. True
8. True
9. True
10. True
11. True
12. True
13. True
14. True
15. True
16. True
17. True
18. True
19. False
20. True



# Handout #2 Refrigerator & Freezer Storage Chart

REFRIGERATOR & FREEZER STORAGE CHART					
<p>These short but safe time limits will help keep refrigerated food 40° F (4° C) from spoiling or becoming dangerous. Since product dates aren't a guide for safe use of a product, consult this chart and follow these tips.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase the product before "sell-by" or expiration dates.</li> <li>• Follow handling recommendations on product.</li> <li>• Keep meat and poultry in its package until just before using.</li> <li>• If freezing meat and poultry in its original package longer than 2 months, overwrap these packages with airtight heavy-duty foil, plastic wrap, or freezer paper; or place the package inside a plastic bag.</li> </ul> <p>Because freezing 0° F (-18° C) keeps food safe indefinitely, the following recommended storage times are for quality only.</p>					
Product	Refrigerator	Freezer	Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
<b>Eggs</b>			<b>Soups &amp; Stews</b>		
Fresh, in shell	3 - 5 weeks	Don't freeze	Vegetable or meat-added & mixtures of them	3 - 4 days	2 - 3 months
Raw yolks, whites	2 - 4 days	1 year	<b>Bacon &amp; Sausage</b>		
Hard cooked	1 week	Don't freeze	Bacon	7 days	1 month
Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, opened	3 days	Don't freeze	Sausage, raw from pork, beef, chicken or turkey	1 - 2 days	1 - 2 months
unopened	10 days	1 year	Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1 - 2 months
<b>TV Dinners, Frozen Casseroles</b>			<b>Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb, &amp; Pork)</b>		
Keep frozen until ready to heat		3 - 4 months	Steaks	3 - 5 days	6 - 12 months
<b>Deli &amp; Vacuum-Packed Products</b>			Chops	3 - 5 days	4 - 6 months
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads	3 - 5 days	Don't freeze	Roasts	3 - 5 days	4 - 12 months
Pre-stuffed pork & lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed w/dressing	1 day	Don't freeze	Variety meats (tongue, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings)	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
Store-cooked convenience meals	3 - 4 days	Don't freeze	<b>Meat Leftovers</b>		
Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks	Don't freeze	Cooked meat & meat dishes	3 - 4 days	2 - 3 months
<b>Raw Hamburger, Ground &amp; Stew Meat</b>			Gravy & meat broth	1 - 2 days	2 - 3 months
Hamburger & stew meats	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months	<b>Fresh Poultry</b>		
Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months	Chicken or turkey, whole	1 - 2 days	1 year
<b>Ham, Corned Beef</b>			Chicken or turkey, parts	1 - 2 days	9 months
Corned beef in pouch with pickling juices	5 - 7 days	Drained, 1 month	Giblets	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
Ham, canned, labeled "Keep Refrigerated," unopened	6 - 9 months	Don't freeze	<b>Cooked Poultry, Leftover</b>		
opened	3 - 5 days	1 - 2 months	Fried chicken	3 - 4 days	4 months
Ham, fully cooked, whole	7 days	1 - 2 months	Cooked poultry dishes	3 - 4 days	4 - 6 months
Ham, fully cooked, half	3 - 5 days	1 - 2 months	Pieces, plain	3 - 4 days	4 months
Ham, fully cooked, slices	3 - 4 days	1 - 2 months	Pieces covered with broth, gravy	3 - 4 days	6 months
<b>Hot Dogs &amp; Lunch Meats (in freezer wrap)</b>			Chicken nuggets, patties	3 - 4 days	1 - 3 months
Hot dogs, opened package	1 week	1 - 2 months	<b>Fish &amp; Shellfish</b>		
unopened package	2 weeks	1 - 2 months	Lean fish	1 - 2 days	6 - 8 months
Lunch meats, opened package	3 - 5 days	1 - 2 months	Fatty fish	1 - 2 days	2 - 3 months
unopened package	2 weeks	1 - 2 months	Cooked fish	3 - 4 days	4 - 6 months
			Smoked fish	14 days	2 months
			Fresh shrimp, scallops, crawfish, squid	1 - 2 days	3 - 6 months
			Canned seafood (Pantry, 5 years)	after opening	out of can
				3 - 4 days	2 months



March 2018

## Handout # 3A Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life (Cheat Sheet) page 1 of 4

### Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life {Cheat Sheet}

Note: Always Look At Expiration Dates And "When In Doubt, Throw It Out"

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Baking powder	1 year	
Baking soda	2 years	
Beans and peas, dried	18 months	
Biscuit mix	12-18 months	
Bread crumbs	2-4 months	
Cake, brownie and cookie mixes	1 year	
Canned fruit	1 year	Unopened
Canned meats and gravies	1 year	Unopened
Canned vegetables	1 year	Unopened
Cereals, ready to eat	6-12 months 2-3 months	Unopened Opened
Cereals, hot	1 year	
Chocolate chips, semi-sweet	1 year	

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Chocolate, unsweetened	18 months	
Cocoa powder	2 years	
Coconut, grated	1 year	Unopened
Coffee, ground	3-5 months (after printed date) 3-5 months	Unopened After opening
Coffee, instant	2 years	
Coffee, whole bean	6-9 months (after printed date) 6 months	Unopened After opening
Cookies, packaged	2-4 months	
Cornmeal	1 year	
Cornstarch	18 months	
Crackers	6 months	

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## Handout # 3B Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life (Cheat Sheet) page 2 of 4

### Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life {Cheat Sheet}

Note: Always Look At Expiration Dates And "When In Doubt, Throw It Out"

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Croutons	6 months	
Flour, cake	6 months	
Flour, white	10-15 months	Opened, in airtight container
Flour, whole wheat	6-8 months	Opened in fridge
Frosting, canned	8 months	Unopened
Fruit, dried	6 months	
Gelatin	12-18 months	
Grits, instant	8 months	
Grits, regular	10 months	
Honey, molasses and syrup	1 year	
Hot chocolate mixes	6-12 months	
Infant formula	12-18 months	
Jelly, jam and preserves	1 year 8 months	Unopened Opened in fridge

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Juice, canned citrus	6 months	Unopened
Juice, canned non-citrus	1 year	Unopened
Ketchup, barbeque sauce	1 year 5 months	Unopened Opened, in fridge
Marshmallows	3 months	
Mayonnaise	4 months 2 months	Unopened Opened in fridge
Milk, evaporated	1 year	Unopened
Milk, non-fat powdered	1-2 years	
Milk, sweetened condensed	1 year	Unopened
Mustard	2 years 1 year	Unopened Opened, in fridge
Nuts, unshelled	8 months	

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## Handout # 3C Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life (Cheat Sheet) page 3 of 4

### Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life {Cheat Sheet}

Note: Always Look At Expiration Dates And "When In Doubt, Throw It Out"

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Oils (canola, corn or vegetable)	1-2 years 6-8 months	Unopened Opened
Oil, olive	2 years	
Onions	4-6 weeks	Dry dark place, with lots of air circulation
Pancake mix	6 months	
Pasta, dried	2 years	Once opened, keep in airtight containers
Peanut butter	6-9 months	
Pickles, olives, relishes	1 year 3 months	Unopened Opened in fridge
Popcorn, unpopped kernels (not in microwavable bags)	1-2 years	
Popcorn, microwaveable	6-8 months	

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Potatoes, white or sweet	3-5 weeks	Dry dark place, with lots of air circulation
Potatoes, instant	1 year	
Pudding mixes	8-12 months	
Rice, brown	1 year	
Rice, mixes	6 months	
Rice, white	2 years	
Salad dressing	10 months 3 months	Unopened Opened in fridge
Salt	Indefinitely	
Sauces, condiments	1 year	Unopened
Shortening	8 months 6 months	Unopened Opened
Soft drinks	6-9 months	Unopened
Spices (and herbs), dried and ground	1-2 years	Airtight containers, discard when scent fades

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# Handout # 3D Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life (Cheat Sheet) page 4 of 4

## Pantry Food Storage Chart: Common Shelf Life {Cheat Sheet}

Note: Always Look At Expiration Dates And "When In Doubt, Throw It Out"

Food Item	Storage Time	Packaging
Spices, dried and whole	2-3 years	Airtight containers, discard when scent fades
Sports drinks, bottled	9 months	
Stuffing mix	6 months	
Sugar, brown	4 months	
Sugar, granulated	2 years	
Sugar, powdered	18 months	
Tea, bags and loose	6-12 months	
Tea, instant	1 year	
Vinegar (balsamic, cider, rice, red wine, white, and white wine)	Indefinitely	Do not store in metal containers
Yeast (active, dry)	Follow package date	

The estimates provided are that, only estimates. Read all information on packaging regarding expiration and use by dates, and how long the item is safe to consume after opening. If a date on a package is shorter or longer than the dates listed, rely on the dates on the package instead.

These listed dates are for pantry shelf-life of foods, and if it states "unopened" for the packaging, there is typically a shorter shelf life once the item is opened, and in addition may need to be refrigerated. Look at the packaging for details. You can find out more about [refrigerated food storage guidelines here](#).

Also, use your senses of sight and smell to be sure food is safe to eat. Even if it says it's within the expiration date periods, if it smells or looks funny throw it out!

Get more free printables and checklists, including more food storage guidelines here: <http://www.home-storage-solutions-101.com/how-to-get-organized.html>

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