Food Product Labeling and Safety

Maryland generates 927,926 tons of food waste every year! You can help reduce this number by making sure you don't throw out food that's still edible.

Common Labels

- **Best, if Used By/Before:** date indicates when a product will be of the best flavor or quality
- **Sell-By:** date tells the store how long it takes to display the product for sale for inventory management
- **Use-By:** date is the last date recommended for product use at peak quality except infant formula. DO NOT buy infant formula after its use by date.
- **Freeze-By:** date indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality

Food Safety or Quality?

All of the common food product dating we see on packaged items are an indication of quality, NOT safety. Regardless of the printed date, you should examine your food for signs of rotting or mold. Being able to spot spoiled food is a great skill for all cooks!

Evaluating Food For Spoilage

Meat
Fading or darkening
Foul odor
Sticky, tacky, or slimy to the touch

Fruit & Vegtables
Sticky, tacky, or slimy to the touch
Foul odor
Unusually soft or mushy texture

IF YOU FIND MOLD:
On firm foods (cabbage, bell peppers, carrots, etc.) cut off one inch around and below the mold – the remainder is safe to eat
On soft foods (cucumbers, peaches, tomatoes, etc.) – discard

Canned Food
Never use if leaking, bulging, badly dented, or cracked.

Donating Packaged Food

If you realize you won't be eating a packaged food item, consider donating it to UMD's Campus Pantry. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, you can still donate packaged food that is past its printed expiration date, so long as it doesn't show any signs of spoilage.

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