



NourishNet

A FOOD RECOVERY TOOLBOX



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.

Labeling Requirements

Except for infant formula, federal regulations do NOT require date labels. Many other foods may be safe to eat long after the date on the package.

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?

Manufacturers provide dates to help consumers/retailers decide when food is of the best quality. **Food products are often safe to consume past the label date.** Regardless of the date, consumers should evaluate the quality of the food product before consumption.



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Evaluating Food For Spoilage

How to evaluate the quality of food products before consumption.

Canned and Jarred Food

Never use food from containers that show possible signs of “botulism” contamination:

Canned Food

- Leaking
- Bulging
- Badly dented
- Foul odor

Jarred Food

- Cracked
- Loose or bulging lids

High-acid foods (pickles, jams, and most fruits) keep their best quality for up to 18 months. Low-acid foods (most vegetables) keep their best quality for 2 to 5 years.

Meat and Poultry

Color changes are common for meat and poultry, spoilage shows the following characteristics:

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

Fresh Produce

- Unusually soft or mushy texture
- Foul odor
- Sticky, tacky, or slimy to the touch

If You Find Mold:

On Firm Produce (cabbage, bell peppers, carrots, etc.)

Cut off one inch around and below the mold — the remainder is safe to eat

On Soft Produce (cucumbers, peaches, tomatoes, etc.) — discard



NSF Convergence Accelerator



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