

## Retail Food Product Dating:

The USDA estimates that 30% of food is lost to waste and spoilage. Some of that food waste is due to consumers throwing away products because they are confused about the expiration dates on food products.

Product food dates are not federally regulated. Food manufacturers voluntarily place dates (expiration dates, best by dates, sell by dates, production codes) on most food items. These dates have nothing to do with food safety- they indicate food quality. This means that you can still consume these food items after the expiration date.

Currently, Food manufacturers are being encouraged to change to a “Best if used by” date instead of expiration dates. This should help consumers understand that the food will still be good/usable after that date.

### Types of Product Dates:

- ◆ Product End Dates: “Best if used by; use before; best of used before”

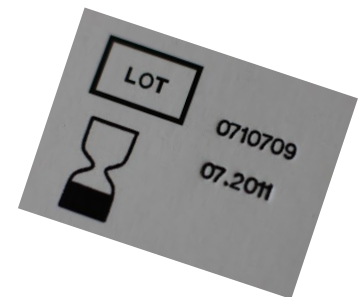
This is the last date manufacturer recommends for product to be at peak quality

Example: Box macaroni and cheese



- ◆ Sell by date: Date the manufacturer recommends that the store sell the product for inventory management purposes.

Example: Bread



- ◆ Use by date: Last date recommended for use.  
Baby formula should not be used after “best buy” date

- ◆ Pack Codes/Manufacturing Date: Series of letters and/or numbers  
Notes when and where product was packed

### How long do canned food last?

- High-acid foods (tomatoes, fruit) with keep best quality for 12-18 months
- Low-acid foods (meats, vegetables) will keep for 2-5 years.

### Dented Cans: Discard cans that are dented, rusted or swollen

- A small dent, but otherwise in good shape can be used.
- A deep dent is one you can lay your finger into. Discard deeply dented cans
- Dents at ends/seals can allow bacteria in. Discard any can dented at the seals