



# UNDERSTANDING Food Date Labels



*Did you know that most food labels do not actually indicate whether that food is safe to eat? Lack of uniformity in food date labels used by manufacturers can cause confusion over the meaning of them, which can lead to wholesome food being discarded.*

## TYPES OF FOOD PRODUCT DATING

### Open-Dating



A calendar date applied by the manufacturer or retailer that tells you the period of time that the food will be at its best quality.

### Closed-Dating



A code that consists of a series of letters and/or numbers applied by manufacturers to identify the date and time of production.

## COMMONLY USED DATE-LABELING PHRASES

### Best if Used By/ Before

Indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

### Sell By

Date that tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.

### Use By

Date that is recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date.\*

### Freeze By

Date that indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

\*Infant Formula is the only product that is Federally Required to have a "Use-By" date label. Several states have passed laws creating "use by" dates for other foods, such as shellfish. Tennessee is one of the few states that does not have any state-level "use by" labeling requirements for foods.

**In an effort to reduce food waste, it is important to know that food products can still be safe to consume past the date on the label, if they are stored and handled properly.**

- Use your senses to evaluate foods past their prime. Spoiled food will look different in texture and color, smell unpleasant, and taste bad.
- Nonperishable items like grains, dried goods, and canned foods can be used well past their label dates.
- Meat, dairy, and eggs have shorter shelf lives and are less safe to use after label dates. For example, milk is often good a week past its due date, however if you notice a sour smell or curdling, dispose of it.

