

Source:

## USDA Food Inspection and Safety Service

There are no uniform or universally accepted descriptions used on food labels for open dating in the United States. As a result, there are a wide variety of phrases used on labels to describe quality dates.

Examples of commonly used phrases:

- A "**Best if Used By/Before**" date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A "**Sell-By**" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.
- A "**Use-By**" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula.

USDA estimates that 30 percent of the food supply is lost or wasted at the retail and consumer levels. One source of food waste arises from consumers or retailers throwing away wholesome food because of confusion about the meaning of dates displayed on the label.

Foods not exhibiting signs of spoilage should be wholesome and may be sold, purchased, donated and consumed beyond the labeled date.

### **Are Foods Safe to Eat After the Date Passes?**

With an exception of infant formula, if the date passes during home storage, a product should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten.

### **Can Food Be Donated After the Date Passes?**

Yes. The quality of perishable products may deteriorate after the date passes but the products should still be wholesome if not exhibiting signs of spoilage. Food banks, other charitable organizations, and consumers should evaluate the quality of the product prior to its distribution and consumption to determine whether there are noticeable changes in wholesomeness.