

# Understanding Product Dating



Type of Dating	What It Means
“Sell-By” Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tells the store how long to keep the product on display to sell</li> <li>• The food item may still be safe and of good quality if eaten after this date.</li> </ul>
“Best if Used By (or Before)” Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The date recommended for best flavor or quality</li> <li>• Not a safety date, food may still be safe to eat after this date</li> </ul>
“Use-By” Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The last date recommended for best flavor or quality, not a safety date</li> <li>• This date is given by the maker of the product.</li> </ul>
“Closed or Coded Dates”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Packing numbers that appear on shelf-stable foods like cans and boxes</li> <li>• Not an expiration date, this date is used by the maker of the product</li> </ul>

## Safely Storing Perishable Foods

- Perishable foods like meat, milk, bread and fresh vegetables spoil quickly. If food is perishable, refrigerate it as soon as possible.
- Once a perishable product is frozen, it will stay safe as long as it is kept frozen.
- To keep food safe, always follow the handling recommendations on the product label. For example, do not let fresh produce come in contact with raw meats.
- Do not leave perishable foods out of the refrigerator or freezer for more than 2 hours.
- Discard food if it has an off odor, flavor, or appearance. This is caused by spoilage bacteria.

## Safely Storing Canned Foods

- Canned foods can be safely stored above freezing temperatures and below 90°F.
- Discard cans if they are dented, rusted or swollen.
- Store high-acid canned foods (tomatoes, fruits) 12-18 months for best quality.
- Store low-acid canned foods (meats, vegetables) 2-5 years for best quality.
- Cans may have a series of numbers listed; these are packing codes. Packing codes are not to be interpreted as a “use-by” date. This code helps the maker of the product locate the product if there is a recall.

**Questions?** This information and more can be found at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) .