



Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



WHAT DO FOOD PRODUCT DATES ACTUALLY MEAN?

Types of Food Product Dates:

“USE-BY”

- The last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality.
- Not a food safety date.
- Refers to best quality.

“SELL-BY”

- Tells the store how long to display the product for sale.
- Is set by the manufacturer.
- Not a food safety date.

“BEST IF USED-BY or BEFORE”

- Informs you about food quality.
- Not a food safety date.
- Date is recommended for best flavor or quality.

Safety of Consuming Food After a Product Date:

- Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor, or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten.
- Foodborne bacteria can grow and may cause foodborne illness if food is mishandled before or after the product date on the package.
- If you notice discoloration or package integrity concerns, the food should not be eaten.

As a Consumer, This is What You Can Do:

Thinking about buying food from a surplus or salvage store, or other type of bargain store? Follow the same food safety tips you would follow when buying food anywhere else.

Don't buy canned or packaged food that is:

- Swollen or has a bulge.
- Dented along the seams.
- Package has been resealed or repaired.
- Rusted along the seams.
- Leaking or torn packaging.

Also remember:

- Food that is required to be refrigerated should be kept at or below 41° F. Avoid buying refrigerated food kept at higher temperatures.
- Don't buy frozen foods whose packages show that the food inside may have melted, then frozen again.
- Ask the store manager if the labels on cans or packages have been changed. If so, the new label might not list the right ingredients or lot numbers. This is especially important if you have a food allergy or other dietary restriction or if a food has been recalled.

Additional Information Can Be Found Here:

[Food Product Dating \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/food-product-dating)

[Food Product Dating | Food Safety and Inspection Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/food-product-dating)

[Surplus, Salvaged, and Donated Foods | FDA](https://www.fda.gov/food/surplus-salvaged-and-donated-foods)

