

BEST, USE, SELL, AND TOSS BY DATES: THE FOOD LABEL DILEMMA

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Why This Topic Matters

1. Americans waste approximately 30-40% of the food supply each year.
2. Misunderstanding date labels leads to premature food disposal.
3. Households are the largest contributors to education, and they can make a big impact.
4. Reducing waste saves money, resources, and helps address food insecurity.

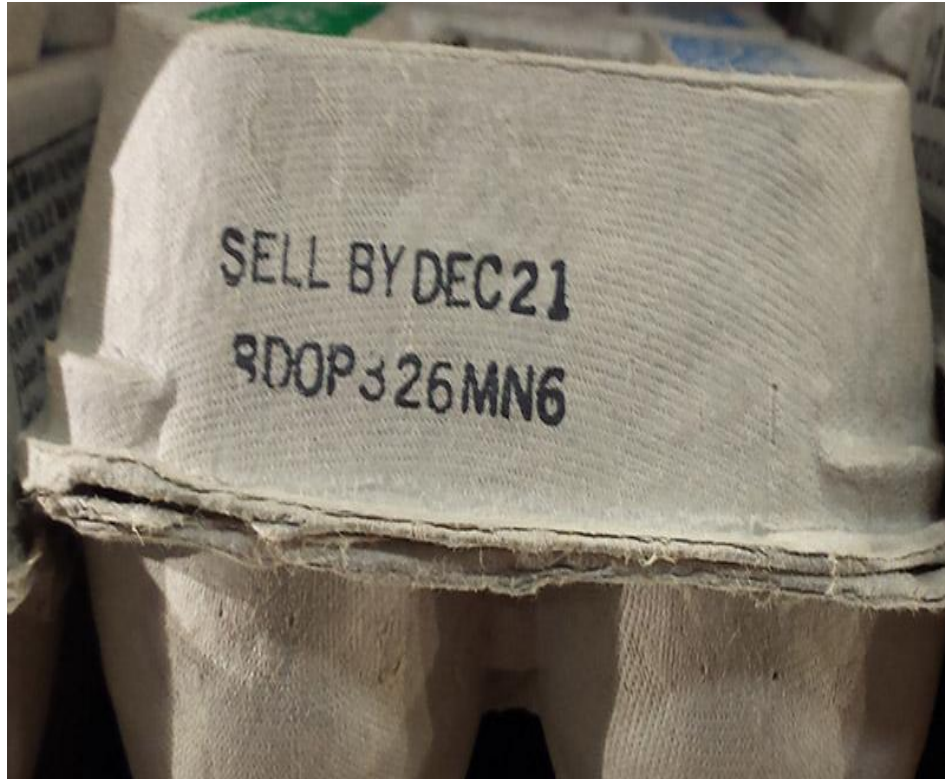
Best By Label

- Best By indicates when a product will be at its best flavor or quality.
- It is NOT an indicator of food safety.
- You can often eat foods after this date if stored properly.
- Quality=not safety



Sell By Label

- Sell By tells the store how long to display the product for sale.
- It is not a safety date.
- Products are still good to consume after this date, especially if stored correctly.
- Sell By = Store inventory



Use By Label

- Use By is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality.
- This label is more relevant for perishable items like dairy, meats, and prepared meals.
- After this date, food safety may be compromised.
- Use By = Safety (mainly for perishables)



When to Toss

- Mold on soft foods (bread, cheese, fruit, etc.)
- Sour or off smells
- Slimy texture on meat or vegetables
- Visible spoilage or discoloration
- Signs of gas buildup or bulging packaging
- Food past "Use By" date for safety (meat, dairy, Baby formula)

Why It's Confusing

- Fear of foodborne illness
- Lack of label understanding
- Marketing influences behavior
- ***'Better safe than sorry'*** mindset

Lack of Regulation

- Most food date labels in the U.S. are not federally regulated.
- Only infant formula requires a federally mandated 'Use By' date.
- This lack of consistency leads to confusion and unnecessary waste.

Behavioral Insights

- Loss aversion: hate wasting money
- Social pressure: clean your plate
- Convenience: easier to toss
- Forgetting what/when we bought

The Problem: Food Waste

- 30-40% of U.S. food goes uneaten
- Households are #1 source of food waste
- Top items wasted: leftovers, produce, restaurant meals

Impact of Food Waste

- Environmental: methane, water, energy waste
- Economic: \$1,500/year per household
- Social: millions go hungry while food is tossed

What Can We Do?

- Learning and teaching what labels mean
- Use our senses (look, smell, taste)
- Plan meals & store smartly
- Compost leftovers

Check Before You Toss

- Look: color and texture
- Smell: off odors
- Taste: small sample (if safe)
- Know real spoilage signs

Planning & Storage Tips

- Label leftovers with date
- Store in clear containers
- FIFO: First In, First Out
- Freeze extra portions

Smart Shopping Habits

- Stick to a shopping list
- Buy in bulk only when needed
- Choose imperfect produce
- Avoid impulse purchases

Restaurant & Takeout Tips

- Take leftovers home
- Split large portions
- Reheat and eat within 3–4 days
- Avoid ordering too much

Community Solutions

- Donate excess food
- Join food-sharing groups
- Volunteer with food rescue orgs

Resources & Tools

- USDA FoodKeeper App
- SaveTheFood.com
- Meal planning templates
- Composting how-to guides

Wrap-Up & Takeaways

- Date labels $\neq$ safety expiration
- Use your senses
- Small changes matter

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS

References

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