

PRODUCT DATING INFORMATION

Sharp Shopper Grocery Outlet strives to provide quality grocery products well below regular retail prices. Sometimes products are sold close to or after manufacturer's recommended sell by dates. This brochure assembles some information to help further explain some product dating issues.

Please remember all products are sold with 100% satisfaction guarantee. If you are not completely satisfied, you can return the product for a full refund.

Since 1988 Sharp Shopper stores have operated under state and federal Department of Agriculture regulations, as do all traditional grocery stores.

We are sometimes asked about product dates with respect to food safety. These dates have little to do with food safety according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Food manufacturers use no standardized dating codes on products. The dates could refer to the date or time of manufacture; a tracking code or suggested dates when a product will still meet the company's standard for freshness or peak quality.

Should you have any concerns about a product on our shelves or purchased from our store, please bring these to our attention. Our desire is that you are satisfied with every purchase. Please remember all products are sold with 100% satisfaction guarantee.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: What is Product Dating?

A: There are two main types of product dating, "open dating" and "closed dating". The most common form of dating is referred to as "open dating." Open dating uses a calendar date as opposed to a code on a food product. Common examples include "Sell by", "Best if used by" and "Use by." Open dating is not a safety date. It is commonly found on perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products. Retailers are forbidden to sell baby formula past the "sell by date." In PA retailers are not allowed to sell fluid milk past the "sell by date." Occasionally, canned goods and boxed goods will display an "open" or calendar date. These are "best if used by" dates for peak quality. These are the manufacturer's recommendations for maximum freshness and nutrient value, not safety dates. Closed Dating or Coded dating generally refers to a manufacturer's code stamped on the product. These codes typically appear on shelf stable products such as canned and boxed foods. Some manufacturers stamp the date the product was manufactured or packaged. Some use a product code that is not able to be deciphered. (US & PA Department of Agriculture)

Q: Is Dating Required by Federal Law?

A: Except for infant formula and some baby food, product dating is NOT required by Federal regulations. However, if a calendar date is used, it must express both the month and day of the month (and the year, in the case of shelf-stable and frozen products). If a calendar date is shown, immediately

adjacent to the date must be a phrase explaining the meaning of the date such as "sell by" or "use before." There is no uniform or universally system used for food dating in the US. (US Dept. Of Agriculture)

Q: Are Retailers Allowed to Sell Products Beyond the Expiration Date of the Package?

A: Yes, as long as a product is wholesome, a retailer may legally sell grocery items including fresh or processed meat and poultry products beyond the expiration date of the package. (Adapted from Food Marketing Institute information)

Q: What is a Product's Shelf Life?

A: This varies depending on the type of product. Many processed and packaged foods are shelf stable, which means that they do not require refrigeration until opened. These items are often referred to as non-perishable for these reasons. Their shelf life is evaluated in terms of the quality of the product. Canned foods can last for years, because shelf stable foods experience very slow rate of organic changes. After several years, however, the product may lose taste and color. (Adapted from National Food Processors Association information)

Q: How Long Does Canned Food Remain Edible and Retain Its Nutritional Content?

A: Canned food has a shelf life of at least two years from the date of processing. Canned food retains its safety and nutritional value well beyond two years, but it may have some variation in quality, such as a change of color or texture. Canning is a high-heat process that renders the food commercially sterile. Food safety is not an issue in products kept

on the shelf in moderate temperatures (75 degrees Fahrenheit and below). The acid content of the food and the lining of the can are important factors in a product's quality and appearance after long periods of storage. (Adapted from mealttime.org., Canned Food Alliance and The National Food Processors Association)

Q: What Does the Product's UPC Code Have to Do with Dating?

A: Nothing. The Universal Production Codes (UPC) or bar codes appear on packages as black lines of varying widths above a series of numbers. They are not required by regulations, but manufacturers print them on most product labels. The bar codes reveal such specific information as the manufacturer's name, product name and size of product. Scanners are able to read the bar codes. The codes do not contain any manufacture or expiration dates and are not used to identify recalled products. (Adapted from US Dept. Of Agriculture)

Q: What About Frozen Foods?

A: Once a perishable product is frozen at proper temperatures, it does not matter if the date expires because food kept frozen continuously is safe indefinitely. Sharp Shopper freezes all packaged items before the expiration date which extends the life. Packing is important to the quality and appearance of frozen foods. Products exposed to air can develop "freezer burn" which does not affect the safety of the product, but can impact taste and quality. (Adapted information from PA Dept. Of Agriculture and American Frozen Food Institute, Sharp Shopper, Inc.)

Q: What Do Can Codes Mean?

A: Cans must exhibit a packing code to enable tracking of the product in interstate commerce. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as to locate their products in the event of a recall. These codes, which appear as a series of letters and/or numbers, might refer to the date or time of manufacture. They aren't meant for

the consumer to interpret as "use-by" dates. There is no book which tells how to translate the codes into dates. (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Q: Dates on Egg Cartons?

A: Use of either a "Sell-By" or "Expiration" (EXP) date is not federally required, but may be State required, as defined by the egg laws in the State where the eggs are marketed. Some State egg laws do not allow the use of a "sell-by" date. Many eggs reach stores only a few days after the hen lays them. Egg cartons with the USDA grade shield on them must display the "pack date" (the day that the eggs were washed, graded, and placed in the carton). The number is a three-digit code that represents the consecutive day of the year (the "Julian Date") starting with January 1 as 001 and ending with December 31 as 365. When a "sell-by" date appears on a carton bearing the USDA grade shield, the code date may not exceed 45 days from the date of pack. (U.S. Depart. of Agriculture)

Q: How long can shelf-stable foods be safely stored on the shelf?

A: According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), food can be safe forever from a foodborne-illness standpoint - but if shelf-stable food has been on the shelf for an extended period of time, you might not want to eat it because the quality may not be good. In this case the "best if used by" date on the label of the product is an indication whether or not the quality of the food is good. Food quality deals with the taste, texture, and nutritional value of food. The FDA does not require an expiration date for shelf-stable foods, since the storage time for these foods is a quality issue, not a food safety concern. (FDA Food Safety)

FOOD DATING LINKS

www.foodsafety.gov - Gateway to Government Food Safety Information

1-888-674-6854 - U.S. Department of Agriculture taped messages on food safety.

www.cfsan.fda.gov - U.S. Food and Drug Administrations Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

www.mealttime.org - The Connell Food Alliance - various food information.

www.gmaonline.org - Grocery Manufacturers Association - various information including food safety by the Association of Food, Beverage and Consumer Products Companies.

www.agriculture.state.pa.us - PA Department of Agriculture - various industry information, products, recalls and food safety information.

www.affi.com - American Frozen Food Institute - various frozen food industry information.

www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets - U.S Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service Information