Decoding Food Dates

We've all wrestled with this question many times: “How long is food safe to eat after its sell-by date has passed?” Being part of the food banking world, we hate to throw away any food that can be given to someone in need; yet our worst fear is that someone will potentially get sick because of unsafe food provided to them. To help with this topic, let's focus on those mysterious dates printed on food containers telling us when to purchase, eat, or throw out the item.

To make matters complicated, the codes and dates that you find on food items can mean multiple things and there’s no continuity between types of products. Interestingly, the federal government does not require or regulate food product dates (with the exception of baby food and baby formula which do have expiration dates and should never be distributed or consumed after this date). The dates are determined by each individual manufacturer and manufacturers use these dates to refer to the peak quality and freshness of food, not safety. So even if a food item is past the date listed, it could still be safe to consume.

Below are the most common date codes that you’ll see on food packages:

- **“Sell-By.”** This store must sell the item before the date listed. (Most often see on milk, eggs, cottage cheese, eggs, lunch meats, packaged salad mixes.)
- **“Best if Used By.”** This date is the manufacturer’s recommendation on when a product is at its peak freshness. After this date, the food is still safe to consume although it will begin to loose nutrients and the quality will lessen. (Most often seen on snacks, cereal, and other dry items.)
- **“Pack Date.”** This date indicates when the product was packaged.

And of course, we can’t just go by the numbers and forgo properly storing food. (A carton of milk will go bad overnight on the kitchen counter regardless of its expiration date!) Food spoilage depends just as much on storing conditions as it does time on the shelf.

Stay tuned for upcoming food safety refresher training courses!

If you have any questions related to food package dates, please email Nicole who can provide you with more information!

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**WAREHOUSE REMINDERS**

Your safety is our priority! Please remember these warehouse safety rules:

- Cell phones and head phones are not permitted in the warehouse
- Everyone must wear closed-toed shoes in the warehouse
- Agencies must remain in designated warehouse areas limited to the Winn-Dixie Charity Market and the Community Room
- No chewing gum in the warehouse

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**calendar reminders**

Feeding Tampa Bay will be closed:

- Thursday, December 24th
- Friday, December 25th
- Thursday, December 31st
- Friday, January 1st

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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM FEEDING TAMPA BAY!**

Do you have an inspiring success story? Do you know a family or individual who receives food assistance that would share their story?

Contact Nicole at ntegge@feedingamericatampabay.org

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

Green beans are a favorite holiday staple. Low in calories and high in vitamins and minerals, these lean pod vegetables are among the most popular garden vegetables in the world. They grow relatively fast and are able to be harvested 45-60 days after planting. Although you will occasionally find raw green beans in a salad, they are almost always cooked before being consumed whether that is through steaming, boiling, frying, or baking. They’re a great accompaniment to many other foods including cheese, nuts, mushroom, seafood, meats, soups, rice, and other vegetables.

**FUN FACT:**

Green beans have been consumed for more than 7,000 years and originated in Peru. Today, there are over 130 different varieties that differ in taste, color, and size of pod.
meet Willie

If your agency has used our wonderful, new Winn-Dixie Charity Market, then you’re sure to have met and worked with Willie. Willie has worked for Feeding Tampa Bay since March and specializes in the operations of the Winn-Dixie Charity Market. Every day, he works hard to provide agencies with a pleasant and productive shopping experience. His responsibilities include making sure the store is clean, safe, and orderly; creating and building product displays; ensuring that the room is fully stocked with product; and rotating product between the warehouse and the sharing floor. Willie says that his favorite part about his job is that he gets to help people every day, in particular our agencies. When Willie is not working, he can be found at the beach or playing the piano which, amazingly, he taught himself how to play!

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Feeding Tampa Bay was honored to be one of twelve food banks to receive $120,000 from Publix Super Markets Charities in November. The money will be used to add a new truck to our fleet. This donation will be an amazing resource for the food bank as it will allow us to pick-up and deliver thousands of pounds of additional food that will end up on the tables of our hungry neighbors in need! Thank you Publix for your generous donation and your commitment to meeting the basic needs of the communities you serve!

AGENCY TIP

Do you have a volunteer who cannot do much manual labor or who would prefer a change of pace? Have this person spend the day using a Sharpie marker to “X” out the barcodes on all the food items you have in your pantry. A marked out barcode signals to grocery stores that the item was donated and not bought. In the situation that a client attempts to return the item to the store, the store clerks will recognize this and not provide a refund to the customer. Not only do grocery stores appreciate when food pantries mark out barcodes, but it ensures that food recovery programs are not jeopardized by those trying to take advantage.

VolunteerMatch

Do you find that it is a struggle to find volunteers? Or perhaps you have a special event that you need even more volunteers for? Or perhaps you want to engage new volunteers from the community?

Then consider using VolunteerMatch.org to find and engage volunteers in the fight against hunger. VolunteerMatch helps nonprofit organizations tap into its network of millions of volunteers to mobilize supporters across the nation. Through a program mix of training, knowledge sharing, and web services, participating nonprofits get the support they need to manage and expand an effective volunteer program.

For more information, visit http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/. 