



Shelf Life Guide of Food Bank Products

Food Banks often receive and distribute products after the date on the package. Manufacturers use date codes to ensure that their products are received by consumers at their peak quality. When a product is past this date, manufacturers and stores often donate the “out of date” products to food banks. When Second Harvest receives these types of items, food bank staff and volunteers monitor the food to ensure the products are usable and that the quality remains good. ***This food is still safe to eat!***

How long is food edible past its coded date? What is its shelf life?

Dates on Food Packages: What Do They Mean?

Date labels are common on many types of food packages. But what do they mean? Is it safe for your program to use or distribute food after the package date? Use the information below to help you decide which outdated foods to distribute and which to discard.

Expiration Date --- Examples: “Expires 2/24/16”, “Do not use after 2/24/16”

- **Products that use this date:** infant formula, baby food, vitamins, over-the-counter drugs, yeast, baking powder, cake mixes, and pectin (from Ancient Greek: πηκτικός pēktikós, "congealed, curdled").
- **What does this date mean?** Although these products may be safe if consumed after this date, their usefulness and quality may be reduced. Rising agents like yeast will be safe after this date, but may not be as effective.

Infant formula, baby food, and over-the-counter drugs should never be consumed after the expiration date because they may not function in the body as they are supposed to.

Food banks do not distribute most baby food past its expiration date. However, other baby products such as juices, cookies and shakes are safe to eat past their date and can be distributed.

Pack Date --- Examples: “Packed on 9/23/16” or “192 VIG 2106”

- **Foods with this date:** canned fruits and vegetables, canned meat and fish, spices, boxes of crackers and cookies
- **What does this date mean?** This is the date the product was packaged at the manufacture. Pack date is generally not intended for consumers but is generally used by manufacturers and retailers to track inventory, rotate items and locate items in case of recall. Sometimes it is written in code, as in the second example. Canned foods may have changes in the taste and texture but will be safe for many years after this date. However, commercially canned foods should be consumed within 1 year for optimal quality.

Understanding food dates, proper food handling and proper storage temperature are critical to a product’s safety and quality. Contact the manufacture for further questions about the product’s best used date.

Sell By Date--- Example: “Sell by March 24, 2016” It is also called a “Pull Date”

- **Foods that use this date:** Refrigerated foods such as: milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, cream, eggs, lunchmeats, packaged salad mixes.
- **What does the date mean?** Stores must remove these products from its shelves by this date. However, the food will be safe to eat after this date if it has been refrigerated continually and if the food has been handled properly. Milk is usually edible at least one week after this date. Other foods like yogurt and eggs will keep more than one week beyond the date listed. These are the types of items that are regularly donated to food banks.

Use By or Best by Date---Examples: “Best if used by 2/3/16” or “Use Before 12/15/16”

- **Foods that use this date:** packaged mixes like macaroni and cheese, boxed soups, bakery products, cheese, cold cereals, peanut butter, mayonnaise and other shelf stable foods. You will also see this coding on baby foods.
- **What does the date mean?** These foods have a long shelf life, but eventually they will begin to lose their flavor and freshness. The date listed is an estimate of how long the food will be of optimal quality. Quality is defined as smell, taste, and texture, not as safety. Therefore, after the date listed, the food may not taste as good, but it will still be safe. **Do not use or distribute baby food that is past the quality (use by) date.**

When in doubt – call the manufacture.

Most boxed or canned food products are still safe to eat past the date on the container. Refrigerated foods, if handled correctly, can have an extended shelf life. If foods are kept continuously frozen, the expiration date is invalid because the food is safe indefinitely, **although the quality will decrease slowly over time.** For this reason, we ask that you only keep frozen product for 1 year. After a year, frozen items should be thrown away.

Donated goods from Second Harvest Food Bank – Are they safe?

Food bank staff and volunteers monitor dates on donated items that Second Harvest receives. However, from time to time some items are overlooked and mistakes are sometimes made. Please learn what each code (date) means and always check the donated items you receive from the food bank to ensure you’re giving your clients good, usable products.

Although SHFB inspects all products before leaving our warehouse, mistakes can be made. The Agency must make the final determination as to the suitability and integrity of any items received from SHFB.

Should an unsafe item be distributed to your agency, please feel free to bring the item and your receipt back to the food bank and we will give you a credit for all the items that are unusable.

TIPS FOR DRY FOOD STORAGE:

- Store cans and boxes (consumable products) at least 6 inches off the floor and at least 18 inches away from the wall so air can circulate.
- Store cans and boxes in a clean, dry area. Store baby products on the top shelf.
- Dry storage temperatures should be between 50-70 degrees, never allow product to be warmer than 85 degrees.
- Temperatures over 100°F or cold below 30°F damage foods and shorten shelf life.
- Rotate your stock by FIFO (**FIRST IN-FIRST OUT**).
- Distribute or use old products before new products.



Chemical Storage

Includes:

- Cleaning products, personal care items, and health and beauty supplies.
- Chemicals should always be stored below all consumable products.
- Store below serving products such as: serving trays, plates (glass, paper, plastic), cups, etc.

Storing Food Safely



Store refrigerated food at 41°F (5°C) or lower



Keep frozen food frozen solid



Store food away from walls and at least six inches (15 cm) off the floor



Store ready-to-eat food above raw meat, seafood, and poultry



Store food only in containers made for food



Store food only in designated storage areas



Loading and Transporting Food Safely

Keep food at safe temperatures in unrefrigerated vehicles.



Cover cold food with thermal blankets or use coolers with ice packs



Keep drive times to 30 minutes or less



Check food temperatures after arriving at the destination

Prevent contamination:



DON'T store raw food over ready-to-eat food



DON'T store allergens over other products



DON'T store chemicals with food products

There's an APP for THAT!

The USDA FoodKeeper App

['FoodKeeper' App: Your New Tool for Smart Food Storage - USDA Blog](https://blogs.usda.gov/.../new-usda-foodkeeper-app-your-new-tool-for-smart-food-storage/)
blogs.usda.gov/.../new-usda-foodkeeper-app-your-new-tool-for-smart-food-storage/

The FoodKeeper application offers users valuable storage advice about more than 400 food and beverage items, including various types of baby food, dairy products and eggs, meat, poultry, produce, seafood, and more.

[FOOD STORAGE AND SHELF LIFE on the App Store - iTunes - Apple](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/food-storage-and-shelf-life/id356207944?mt=8)
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/food-storage-and-shelf-life/id356207944?mt=8>

Food Storage and Shelf Life takes the guesswork out of where to store your food and how long it will remain fresh.

[ShelfLife - Android Apps on Google Play](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=chad.tools.shelflife&hl=en)
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=chad.tools.shelflife&hl=en>

Can help you keep track of goods and food shelf life.



WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

How do you know when to throw it out?

Boxes

Boxes with bags inside:

- Torn or leaking
- Mold or foreign objects



Boxes without an inside bag:

- Is open or torn
- Has live or dead insects, webs, or droppings
- Is stained or wet



Cans and Jars

- Leaks or stains
- Bulging
- Rust
- Dents on the seams or lid
- Cracks
- Foul odor
- Safety seals are broken or missing
- Lids are loose or missing
- Foods exhibit changed color or odor ---**Never taste potentially unsafe foods.**

Discard Cans With These Defects



Severe dent in seam



Deep dents in can body



Missing or unreadable labels



Swollen or bulging ends



Holes or signs of leaking



Rust that cannot be wiped off

Shelf-Stable Product--- Shelf-stable or “dry” foods (cans, boxes, and bags) can remain edible up to several months or even years past their code date.

The following chart indicates how long a specific food can be eaten after its code date when you follow safe food handling guidelines. If you have any questions, call your Agency Relations Manager at Second Harvest Food Bank: (865) 521-0000.

Shelf Stable Product	Shelf Life After Code
BABY FOOD	
Food in jars or cans	Expiration Date
Cereal: dry mixes	Expiration Date
Formula	Expiration Date
Juice	1 year
Beverages	
Coffee: instant, ground	2 years
whole bean	1 year
Coffee Creamer: Powder	2 years
Liquid	9 months
Instant Breakfast	6 months
Nutritional Aid Supplements	1 year
Juice and Juice Concentrate	1 year
Milk: Shelf Stable UHT	1 year
Non-fat dry	18 months
Evaporated and/or condensed	1 year
Soy or Rice Milk, shelf stable	3 months
Seltzer or Club Soda	6 months
Soda: Regular and Diet	6 months
Tea: Instant	2 years
Bags	18 months
Flavored Water	18 months
Water	18 months
Bread and Grain Products	
Breads, including rolls, commercial	7 days
Baking Mixes: bread, brownie, cake, muffin, pudding	1 year
Cakes: Prepared	4 days
Cereal: Ready-to-eat	1 year
Cook before eating	6 months
Cookies: Packaged	2 months
Flour: Cake or All Purpose	1 year
whole wheat and other whole grain flours	6 months
Macaroni and Cheese	2 years
Pancake Mix	6 months or less
Popcorn	2 years
Potatoes: Instant	1 year
Pasta: Dry, without egg	2 years
Pasta: Dry, with egg	1 year

Rice: White	2 years	
Rice: Brown	1 year	
Rice or Pasta Meals (ex: Hamburger Helper, skillet dinners)	18 months	
Sugar: White	2 years	
Brown, light and dark	18 months	
Cooler or Freezer Product	When to Throw Out After Sell-By Date	
Dairy	Refrigerator (41°F or below)	Freezer (0°F or below)
Butter	3 months	9 months
Cheese: Hard	6 months	6 months
Soft	1 week	Do Not Freeze
Cottage Cheese	2 weeks	Do Not Freeze
Cream Cheese	2 weeks	Do Not Freeze
Cream: Half & Half	3-4days	4 months
Heavy Creamer	10 days	Do Not Freeze
Dips made with sour cream	2 weeks	Do Not Freeze
Eggs, in shell	5 weeks	Do Not Freeze
Ice Cream and Ice Cream Bars	N/A	6 months
Margarine	6 months	12 months
Milk	1 week	1 month
Pudding	1 month	Do Not Freeze
Sour Cream	2 weeks	Do Not Freeze
Yogurt	2 weeks	2 months
Whipped Cream, real or aerosol can	4 weeks	Do Not Freeze
Whipped Topping, non-dairy	3 months	Do Not Freeze
Fish/Seafood, uncooked	Do not thaw and refreeze	Do not thaw and refreeze
Lean Fish: Cod, Flounder, Sole, Haddock, Pollock	2 days	8 Months
Fatty Fish: Salmon, Mackerel, Perch	2 days	3 months
Shrimp and other shellfish	2 days	12 months
Juice Concentrates		
Juice Concentrates: All Types	10 days	1 year
Meats, uncooked, raw	Do not thaw and refreeze	
Beef, Lamb, Pork, Steaks, Chops, or Roast	5 days	1 year
Chicken and Turkey	2 days	9 months
Meat, Processed		
Hot Dogs	2 weeks	6 months
Luncheon Meats	2 weeks	6 months
Bacon	1 week	1 month

Cooler or Freezer Product	When to Throw Out After Sell-By Date	
	Refrigerator (41°F or below)	Freezer (0°F or below)
Meat Processed (continued)		
Sausage: Raw	2 days	2 months
Smoked Links, Patties	1 week	2 months
Pepperoni	3 weeks	2 months
Chicken Nuggets or Patties	2 days	3 months
Fried	4 days	4 months
Deli Foods		
Main Dishes or Meals	4 days	3 months
Meats in gravy or broth	2 days	6 months
Salads: Prepared (macaroni, egg)	4 days	Do Not Freeze
Spinach or Salad, Bagged	Expiration Date	Do Not Freeze
Side Dishes: Cooked Vegetables, Rice, Potatoes	4 days	2 months
Fruit: Cut	Sell By Date	Do Not Freeze
Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous
Canned Biscuits, Rolls, Pizza Dough	Sell By Date	Do Not Freeze
Ready-to-Bake Pie Crust or Pizza Crust	Sell By Date	2 months
Cookie Dough	Sell By Date	2 months
Frozen TV Dinners	N/A	6 months
Tofu	Sell By Date	Do Not Freeze
Soy Meat Substitutes (ex: meatless hot dogs, meatless burgers)	Sell By Date	18 months
Mayonnaise (refrigerate after opening)	2 months	Do Not Freeze
Ketchup (unopened)	1 year or change in color	
Ground Black Pepper	2-3 years	
Salt	Indefinitely	
Salad Dressings: (opened/unopened) Ranch, Blue Cheese, Caesar	1-2 months	
Italian or Balsamic Vinaigrette	3-4 months	
Garlic, chopped jar	18 months unopened	Expiration date when opened & refrigerated

Tips on Storing Fresh Produce:

- Educate workers about the importance of restroom use and proper hand washing.
- Ensure that transportation vehicles are clean and sanitary. Produce should not be shipped in trucks which have carried live animals or harmful substances.
- Cool fruits and vegetables quickly to minimize the growth of pathogens. Most fruits and vegetables have the best quality when kept refrigerated.
- Some items like onions and potatoes can be stored outside the cooler. Potatoes should be kept in a cool dry space.
- Tomatoes taste best if not refrigerated.
- Do not load refrigeration beyond their cooling capacity. Refrigeration should have good circulation.
- Wash produce before consumption.

Follow these storage guidelines to help keep food safe and maintain food quality.

For food recall information you may log onto:

www.fda.gov or www.foodsafety.gov



Sources:



Dating

1. <http://extension.wsu.edu/clark/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2014/02/DecodingFoodDates.pdf>
2. [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Food Product Dating/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Food_Product_Dating/index.asp)
3. www.foodsafetynews.com
4. www.foodsafety.gov

Food Storage and Transportation

1. www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/ResourcesForYou/HealthEducators/UCM109315.pdf
2. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Search/Search_Results/Index.asp?q=food+storage&mode=simple&num=10&as_occt=any&site=FSIS&sort=rel&x=9&y=12
3. Shelf Life of Food Bank Products by Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/pdf/shelflifeguide.pdf
4. http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg_food.html
5. [Feeding America- Storing Food Safety Chart](#)
6. [Feeding America-Loading and Transporting Chart](#)

Can Safety

1. www.food-finders.org/Can_Safety_Fact_Sheet.pdf
2. <http://www.synergytrainingonline.com/Resources/Documents/Dented%20Can%20Guideline.pdf>
3. [Feeding America Can Safety](#)

Freezing

1. www.fsis.usda.gov/.../focus_on_freezing/index.asp - 55k

Refrigeration

1. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/refrigeration_&_food_safety/index.asp

Produce Safety

Food Safety Begins on the Farm “A Grower’s Guide” by Cornell Good Agricultural Practices Program www.GAPs.cornell.edu or call (607)-254-5383 E-mail: eab38@cornell.edu

Chemical Storage

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, & National Food Service Management Institute. (2005). *HACCP-based standard operating procedure: Storing and using poisonous or toxic chemicals*. Retrieved February 12, 2009, from <http://www.nfsmi.org/documentLibraryFiles/PDF/20080213011620.pdf><http://www.nfsmi.org/documentLibraryFiles/PDF/20080213011620.pdf>

This Shelf Life Guide

If you would like a copy of this document or any of the picture charts in color, please send an email to one of the following email addresses:

agencyrelations@secondharvestetn.org