

# READING AND UNDERSTANDING FOOD DATE LABELS

A recent study has estimated that Americans lose \$30 billion each year by throwing away food based on misunderstood date labels.

Currently there are no federal standards on how products should be dated, which makes Use-by, Sell-by and Best-by dates extremely confusing. Knowing how to interpret these date labels can help save money and food.

## **What do date labels really mean?**

**Use-by:** indicates when food should be used to ensure the best taste and quality. Foods that are past this date may not taste as fresh, but are still safe to eat.

**Sell-by:** guidelines for retailers to know when food will be at its best quality. Because these dates are designed to build in quality, in most instances these foods will maintain their shelf life after the sell-by date.

**Best-by:** the date that food will be at optimal quality. This doesn't necessarily mean that the food is unsafe to eat after this date.

## **So how do you know if food is safe to eat?**

Use your senses. The best way to determine if food is safe to eat is by taste and smell. If it smells off, tastes strange or has an unusual texture, it's probably best to avoid it.

## **To learn more visit:**

[Save the Food](#)

[USDA Food Product Dating](#)

[How dated food labels contribute to food waste](#)

[NPR.org](#)

