

Expiration Dates

Florida Consumers concerned about product expiration dates in the United States should know that the Food and Drug Administration Retail Food Code does not preclude the sale of food that is past the expiration date indicated on the label. FDA does not require “expired by,” “use by” or “best before” dates on food products. This information is entirely at the discretion of the manufacturer. Federal laws and regulations require food to be wholesome and fit for consumption.

Foods available to consumers are expected to be safe to eat and not harm consumers or cause illness. This safety is achieved by food safety regulations written and enforced by federal, state and local food safety departments in conjunction with food safety programs implemented by the wholesale and retail industry. Questions frequently arise regarding the safety of food being sold past the “expiration date”. Below are common types of dates seen on food packaging and a definition of each of these terms:

- **“Best if used by”** is the suggested date from the manufacturer that guarantees the best flavor and quality in a food product. The food product is safe for consumption after this point; however, taste may be compromised if consumed after this date.
- **“Use by”** is the date the manufacturer has recommended for use of the product. The food product is safe for consumption after this date yet the flavor and quality may not be as good as when it was initially produced.
- **“Sell-by”** is the date that tells retailers when the manufacturer wants the food product removed from retail shelving.

There are other dates, letters and numbers you may find on food items. This information is used by the manufacturer to track the food products should a recall be necessary. Foods past their “best if used by,” “use by,” or “sell-by” date may be sold to consumers provided the items are still “wholesome and fit for consumption.”

Storage Times

Since product dates are not a guide for safe use of a food product, how long can the consumer store and the food be assured of a quality product? Follow these tips:

- Purchase the product before the date recommended by the manufacturer.
- If purchased refrigerated or labeled keep refrigerated, take the food home immediately after purchase and refrigerate or freeze promptly.
- Follow handling recommendations on the product.
- For fresh or uncooked meat products, USDA recommends following the “use-by” or “sell-by” date.

For more information, visit:

1-800-HELP FLA
FDACS.gov