

INTERPRETING LABEL DATES

PERISHABLE PRODUCTS

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Refrigerator Storage of Fresh or Uncooked Products

Product	Storage Times After “Sell-By” Date
Milk	7 days
Yogurt	10 days
Soft Cheeses	7 days
Hard Cheeses	4 weeks
Eggs	5 weeks
Leafy Greens	7 days

Almost all meat products distributed by the food bank will be frozen; all items were frozen before or on their “sell-by” date. The following applies to the occasional meat products that are not distributed frozen.

Product	Storage Times After “Sell-By” Date
Poultry	2 days
Ground Meat & Sausage	2 days
Beef, Veal, Pork & Lamb	5 days
Luncheon Meats/Hot Dogs	14 days
Bacon	7 days
Produce	Visual Inspection
Fresh Bakery Goods (Cakes, Bread, and Cookies)	Visual Inspection

“**Sell by**” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale.

“**Best if Used by (or before)**” date is recommended for best flavor and quality.

“**Use by**” date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality.

Safety of product: After stamped date, product should be safe and wholesome if handled and stored properly, see following tips:

- If product has a “use-by” date, follow that date.
- If product has a “sell-by” date or no date, cook, freeze or refrigerate the product by the times on the chart above.

Storage Times: If perishable, take the food home immediately and refrigerate promptly (refrigerate at 40 °F [4.4 °C] or below). **Freeze food if you can’t use it within times.**

Thawed or partially thawed food in the freezer may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40 °F or below. Partial thawing and refreezing may affect the quality of some food, but the food will be **safe to eat**.

Freezing most perishable foods before the posted date helps to keep them safe.

The Food Safety and HACCP Committee (FSHC) of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County developed the above chart by using information from USDA, Feeding America, Food Keeper Guide (Food Marketing Institute and Cornell University). The FSHC took into account the amount of time product may stay in storage at the food bank and/or at a Community Partner site. When selecting dates to be used by the sorting line, the

FSHC used food safety as the overriding criteria; the next consideration was food quality followed closely by having as much food as possible available for our Community Partners.

References used:

[USDA Food-Safety-Fact-Sheets/Food Labeling](#)

[Food Keeper Guide Food Safety.gov](#)

Product	Safe to keep past stamped date ¹
Cans, Bottles & Plastic Boxes, low acidity	4 years ²
Cans and Bottles, high acidity (includes tomatoes, fruit, 100% juice)	21 months ³
Cans and Bottles, Miscellaneous (milk, frosting, sauces)	15 months
Peanut Butter	15 months
Dry Goods Boxed or Bagged, (pasta, beans, white rice, spices, and coffee)	2.5 years
Dry Goods Boxed or Bagged, cake mixes, flour, baking soda	15 months
Dry Goods-Boxed or Bagged, Miscellaneous (brown rice, cereal)	1 year
Cookies, Chips, Popcorn	9 months
Water	18 months ⁴
Condiments (including mayo, oils)	18 months
Beverages (soad, carbonated items, soy and rice milk)	5 months
Non-Food Items (Health & Beauty)	No Expiration
Over the Counter Medication/Vitamins (Ingested)	Throw Away ⁵
Baby Food Products & Formula	Throw Away ⁶
Alcoholic Beverages	Throw Away

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¹ Stamped Date includes:

- “Sell By” dates
- “Best if Used By” dates
- “Use By” dates

² Cans are safe indefinitely, USDA recommends these guidelines for food quality. Food quality is being defined as palatable and reasonably nutritious for its food category.

³ High acid canned foods (tomatoes, fruits) will keep their best quality for 12 to 18 months.

⁴ It’s not the water, it’s the packaging. After 18 months the packaging begins to compromise the safety and quality of the water.

⁵ Over the counter medications are medications that are available without a doctor’s prescription. Personal care items are not included.

⁶ Feeding America Requirement (Check Long List for toddler food).

References used:

[USDA Food-Safety-Fact-Sheets/Food Labeling](#)

[Food Keeper Guide Food Safety.gov](#)