



'Best By' vs. 'Use By' What's the Difference?

Food labels can be confusing, but they don't have to lead to waste! Here's what those dates really mean:



Best if Used By/Before

This means the food will taste its best by this date. It's about quality, *not* safety. Most foods are still fine to eat after this.



Sell-By

This date helps stores with stocking and inventory. It doesn't mean the food is bad after that date, and you've usually got some time!



Use-By

This is the last date the maker suggests using the product for peak quality. It's *not* about safety, unless it's baby formula, which does expire.



Freeze-By

This tells you when to pop it in the freezer for best taste and texture later. It's not a deadline for safety or buying.



Trust Your Senses

Even if the date says it's still good, always check for signs of spoilage before eating.



Mold, unusual colors, or a slimy film? Time to let it go.



If it smells sour, rotten, or off, toss it.



If it tastes weird or off, don't risk it.



Sticky, slimy, or overly soft when it shouldn't be? Nope.

*Almost **90%** of Americans throw out food too early because of confusion about date labels. You're not alone, but you can be part of the solution!*

CONTACT US →



win.win@uky.edu



859-218-5081



winwin.ca.uky.edu



National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Martin-Gatton
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
*Department of Dietetics and
Human Nutrition*



This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2023-38640-39572 through the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under subaward number FLW24-011. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.