



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Package Dates: What They Mean**

I receive many questions from consumers who are confused about package dating. It can be confusing as there are many types of dating on packages, and they all mean something different. There are four basic dates used by food processing companies. They are the: pack date, sell or pull date, expiration date, and freshness date.

The **PACK DATE** is the day the food was cooked, processed, and packaged. It is used on canned foods and some fresh produce. Freshness indicators for these products are that the can has no dents, nicks, or bulges, as well as the date the product was packed.

The **SELL** or **PULL DATE** is the last day a food produce is to be sold. It allows for short time storage in the consumer's refrigerator. These products include milk and dairy products, ice cream, cold cuts, salad bar items, fresh prepared vegetables, frozen baked goods, frozen vegetables, fresh packaged meats, cold cuts, and eggs. Freshness indicators for these products include the package date but also the odor and no evidence of "melt down."

The **EXPIRATION DATE** is the last day a food should be eaten or used. These food products include yeast and baby food. The freshness indicators for these products include no bulges and no indicators of tampering (the pop top is intact) as well as the package date.

The **FRESHNESS DATE** is the date at which a food will have passed its quality peak. Baked goods such as rolls, cakes, pies, and bread are freshness dated. Freshness indicators for these products include the softness of the bread and no evidence of mold as well as the package or shelf date.

Food processors sometimes package date their products with a code, usually a series of numbers or letters in a certain sequence. This code provides the food processor with quality control information, such as the batch number, as well as dating information. In addition, many food-processing companies are willing to answer your questions, or even reimburse you the cost of the food if it is spoiled.

If you suspect a food is bad, look at the package for the date and for information on how to contact the company. Some companies provide a phone number, while others provide an address. Most will tell you to send the label, the code number if not on the label and the UPC symbol.

If you wish to "decode" label information, you can call these companies toll-free:

Dole	1-800-232-8800
Frito Lay	1-800-352-4477
Betty Crocker	1-800-328-6787
General Mills	1-800-328-1144
Kraft	1-800-847-1997
Kellogg	1-800-426-4891

Additional toll-free customer service numbers for other companies may be obtained by consulting a toll-free directory.

Source: "The Great Food Fight," Institute of Food Technologists.

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