



**Placer County  
Cooperative Extension Office**  
11477 E Avenue  
DeWitt Center  
Auburn, CA 95603  
(530) 889-7350

**Nevada County  
Cooperative Extension Office**  
255 So. Auburn Street  
Veteran's Memorial Hall  
Grass Valley, CA 95945  
(530) 273-4563

**Website:**  
<http://ceplacervevada.ucanr.edu>

**For more information,  
contact:**  
Rosemary Carter  
UC CalFresh Program Mgr.  
(530) 889-7350

**Email:**  
[carter@ucanr.edu](mailto:carter@ucanr.edu)

**Source:**  
[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

It is the policy of the University of California (UC) and the UC Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources not to engage in discrimination against or harassment of any person in any of its programs or activities (Complete nondiscrimination policy statement can be found at <http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/files/215244.pdf>)

Inquiries regarding ANR's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to John I. Sims, Affirmative Action Compliance Officer/Title IX Officer, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2801 Second Street, Davis, CA 95618, (530) 750-1397

## Food Product Dating

Food product dating can be confusing. What does the date printed on a food product actually mean? Is the product "spoiled" and therefore toxic if consumed after the date shown? Read on to find out what product dating is, if it is dating required by Federal Law, and more.

### What is Food Product Dating?

There are two types of product dating that may appear on a product label.

**Open Dating** is a calendar date applied to a food product by the manufacturer or retailer. This date provides the consumer with information on the estimated period of time for which the product will be of best quality. It also helps the store determine how long to display the product for sale.

**Closed Dating** is a code that consists of a series of letters and/or numbers applied by manufacturers to identify the date and time of production.



### Does Federal Law Require Dating?

Federal regulations only require product dating on infant formula.

For meat, poultry, and egg products under the jurisdiction of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), dates may be voluntarily applied. They must be labeled truthfully and not misleading. They must also be in compliance with FSIS regulations. This means a calendar date must

express both the month and day of the month. For shelf-stable and frozen products, the year must also be displayed. Also, immediately adjacent to the date must be a phrase explaining the meaning of that date such as "Best if Used By".



## Commonly Used Phrases

There are no universally accepted descriptions used on food labels for open dating in the United States. As a result, a wide variety of phrases are used. Three commonly used phrases are:

- ◆ **Best if Used By/Before:**  
Indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

*Manufactures provide dating to help consumers and retailers decide when food is of best quality.*

- ◆ **Sell-By:** Date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.
- ◆ **Use-By:** Date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula.

## Date on Egg Cartons

If the egg carton has an expiration date printed on it, be sure that the date has not passed when the eggs are purchased. That is the last day the store may sell the eggs as fresh.

On eggs which have a Federal grademark, such as Grade AA, the date cannot be more than 30 days



from the date the eggs were packed into the carton.

As long as you purchase a carton of eggs before the date expires and follow food safety storage guidelines, you should be able to use all the eggs safely in three to five weeks after the date you purchase them.

## Storing Food Safely

*In addition to checking dates, follow these tips to ensure your food is safe to eat.*

- ☑ Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).
- ☑ Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer with an appliance thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40 °F or below and the freezer at 0 °F or below.
- ☑ Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days of purchase.
- ☑ Perishable food, such as meat and poultry, should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and to prevent meat juices from getting onto other food.
- ☑ To maintain quality when freezing meat and poultry in its original package, wrap the package again with foil or plastic wrap that is recommended for the freezer.
- ☑ In general, high-acid commercially canned food such as tomatoes, grapefruit, and pineapple can be stored unopened on the shelf for 12 to 18 months.
- ☑ Low-acid commercially canned food such as meat, poultry, fish, and most vegetables will keep 2 to 5 years, if the unopened can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, and dry place. Discard cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted.