



Food Industry Bulletin

Advice for the Food Industry from the Department of Health and your local Council

BEST BEFORE AND USE-BY DATES

Some businesses are not aware of the distinction between Best Before and Use-By dates and the requirements that apply to their use.

Background

Most packaged foods must show a date mark if the food has a shelf life of 2 years or less. The exceptions are listed later in this Bulletin.

While bread can carry a Baked On or Baked For date, the date mark that must be applied to other packaged foods is a Best-Before or Use-By date. These two terms have distinct meanings and are not interchangeable.

It is the manufacturer's responsibility to know which date to apply and the form it must take and it is the retailer's responsibility to know the restrictions that apply to the sale of foods beyond their date marks.

Best-before

A Best-Before date can be applied by the manufacturer when the food cannot become unsafe over time. Such foods might become stale, sour, soggy, or in some way spoiled after their Best-Before date, but should not cause illness if consumed.

A retailer is not prohibited from selling foods after the Best-Before date has expired but the food must still be suitable for consumption and meet customers' reasonable expectations. For this reason it is advisable to inform customers if foods are being discounted close to or after their Best-Before date.

Use-By

A Use-By date indicates the last date on which the food may be consumed safely. **Retailers must not sell food after the Use-By date has expired.**

Changing or obscuring Date Marks

It is an offence under the Food Act to change a date mark without approval from the SA Department of Health, which will only be provided under limited circumstances. It is also an offence to obscure the date mark with pricing or "special" stickers or similar.

Some packaged foods do not require a Date Mark

Foods with a life expectancy greater than 2 years and those foods generally exempted from labelling requirements do not require date marking. This includes foods that are made and packaged on the

premises from which it is sold, foods packaged in the presence of the purchaser, cut or whole fresh fruit or vegetables (except sprouts) and food delivered packaged ready for consumption at the express order of the purchaser (such as delivered pizzas).

Individual portions packs of ice cream or foods in small packages also do not require a date mark.

Additional information for Manufacturers

Required form of Date (with Use-by or Best-Before)

- Food with a date mark of 3 months or less must have a date mark containing the day and the month. For example, 3 Dec or 3 12.
- Food with a date mark of greater than 3 months must have a date mark containing the month and the year. For example, Dec 06 or 12 06.

In both cases a full date mark is satisfactory. For example, 3 Dec 06 or 3 12 06.

Statement of Storage Conditions

The label on a packaged food must include a statement of any storage conditions required to ensure the food will keep for the period specified by the date mark. For example, 'Keep Refrigerated', 'Store at 5°C or less'.

More information

If you have any queries about safe handling of food contact an Environmental Health Officer at your local Council or the Food Section of the Department of Health on 8226-7100 or food@health.sa.gov.au

COUNCIL CONTACT INFORMATION

