Food Product Dating

Confusion over date labeling contributes to food waste. Except for infant formula and some baby food, product dating is not required by federal regulations. There is no universally accepted system for dating food and product dating is voluntary and varies by the manufacturer. For this reason, appearance and smell is a better indicator of food quality than a product date, and ensuring cold foods are kept cold is a better assurance of safety than a product date.

Most Common Types of Dating

- A Freshness or "Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- A "Best if used By (or Before) date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is **not** a purchase or safety date.

An expiration date or "Use-By" date is the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality and is determined by the manufacturer.

What should you do if the date has expired?

If the date has expired, a product should still be safe, wholesome, and of good quality if it has been properly handled. Keep cold foods under 40 degrees F at all times.

Improperly handled food may sour, spoil, or go stale and will be of lower quality but should not cause food borne illness. Dairy products, for example, will still be of good quality for 1-14 days after their 'use by" date, but will sour or spoil within hours if not refrigerated.

Don't eat food that has an off odor, flavor, or appearance whether or not it is past the product date.

Product	Shelf Life Past Code
Baby Food (Jars)	Do not use beyond code
Baby Juice or Formula (Jars or Cans)	Do not use beyond code
Bread/Bakery Products	3-10 days
Canned Goods	1-2 years
Rice	1 year
Yogurt	1-3 weeks
Aseptic Containers	1 year
Jars/Bottles	6-12 months
Cereal	6 months
Crackers	3 months
Dried Beans	1-2 years
Freezer Products	3-12 months
Pasta	1 year
Prepared Salads/Dips	Do not use beyond code
Refrigerated Juices/Teas	1-4 weeks