

# IS THIS STILL GOOD TO EAT?

## THREE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FOOD DATE LABELING

There are a variety of phrases used on food date labels in the U.S. to describe quality dates such as “Best if Used By/Before”, “Sell-By”, “Use-By”, and “Freeze-By”.

This can be confusing and may result in discarding perfectly wholesome food, which is costly to consumers and harms the environment.

*Best if Used By*

*Use-By*



*Freeze-By*

*Sell-By*

So here are three things you need to know about date labeling to avoid throwing away food that is still safe to consume:

- #1** Except for infant formula, food date labels are not indicators of food safety and are not required by Federal law. Manufacturers provide dating to help consumers and retailers decide when food is of peak quality.
- #2** Becoming more commonly used is the USDA-recommended “Best if Used By” label to signal when the product is at its best flavor or quality.
- #3** If the food date label passes during home storage, the food product (except for infant formula) should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off-odor, flavor, or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten.

Learn more about USDA’s “Food Product Dating” at:

**Food Product Dating | Food Safety and Inspection Service ([usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov))**