



SUTTER COUNTY

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Building Inspection
Code Enforcement

Engineering/Water Resources
Environmental Health/CUPA

Planning
Road Maintenance

FOOD EXPIRATION DATES

Food "expiration" dates don't mean as much as many people think. Most food is still edible and safe after the "expiration" date but may not be at peak freshness or flavor.

There are two types of dating that are usually displayed on a food product: "Open Dating" and "Closed Dating."

- **"Open Dating"** is a calendar date that helps stores determine how long to display a product. It also helps the purchaser decide when to purchase or use the product by for *best quality*. In addition to the open date, there must be a phrase such as "sell by" or "use by" to explain the meaning of the date. These are found primarily on perishable foods such as meat and dairy products.
- **"Closed Dating"** is a series of production numbers used by the manufacturer to indicate when a product was made. They primarily appear on shelf stable products such as cans and boxes of food.

Product dates are **not** expiration dates. They generally indicate when a product should be used for best quality.

- **"Sell By"** dates are used by stores to determine when to sell items by. They are not safety deadlines but may indicate products that have been sitting on the shelf longer.
- **"Best By/Before"** dates indicate when products will be of best flavor or quality. They are not purchase by dates or safety deadlines.
- **"Use By"** dates mean products are no longer at peak quality according to the manufacturer. They are not safety deadlines.

Expiration dates on food are **not required** by any federal law, although some states require such dates on meat and/or milk. As a food product passes its "expiration" date, it may not taste as fresh and some products, like milk, may go sour. Foods not exhibiting signs of spoilage should be wholesome and may be sold, purchased, donated and consumed beyond the labeled "expiration" date.*

Food Donations and Food Waste

Confusion or misinterpretation of date labels on foods is a key factor leading to food waste in America and as a result, up to 90% of consumers discard some foods prematurely. Food is the single most prevalent item in California's waste stream, with over 5.5 million tons of food dumped in its landfills every year, costing consumers and industry \$162 billion each year nationally. Reducing food losses by

just 15% would save enough food to feed more than 25 million Americans every year. According to estimates, more than 6 million Californians, including 1 in 4 children, suffer from food insecurity.

***The ONLY enforceable expiration date:** Federal regulations require a "Use-By" date on the product label of infant formula. Consumption by this date ensures the formula contains the quantity of each nutrient as described on the label and will maintain the quality to pass through an ordinary bottle nipple. The "Use-By" date is selected by the manufacturer, packer or distributor of the product on the basis of product analysis and conditions of handling, storage, preparation, and use printed on the label. California law prohibits the sale of infant formula past its labeled "Use-By" date. Do not buy or use baby formula after its "Use-By" date.