



Food Date Labels and Product Distribution Guidelines

Federal, State and Local Laws

Federal Law: There is no federal law regulating food dates. However, the FDA and USDA do seek to protect consumers from misleading food labels.

The FDA does not require foods to be labeled, the only exception to this is infant formula which is labeled with an “expiration date”. *As the nutritional value of infant formula may not be optimal after the “expiration date”, Foodshare does not distribute post dated infant formula.*

The USDA allows each state to determine how meat, dairy and eggs should be labeled in their state.

Connecticut State Law: CT requires a “sell by date” on dairy products only. This date is not intended to reflect the quality of the product. There is no prohibition on dairy products being donated after their “sell by date”. *Foodshare distributes dairy products days after the “sell by date” and allow the consumer to use their sense of taste and smell to determine the quality of the product.*

Local Departments of Health: Local health departments may have their own guidelines about what products can be distributed in your area to your clients. *Foodshare may distribute products to our programs that local health departments will not allow you to distribute.*

A Summary of Federal and Connecticut Laws regulating Date Labels can be found here: *Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic Legal Fact Sheet for Connecticut.*

Below are Foodshare’s guidelines for unopened, product shelf life after the code date. These are the guidelines we use when accepting product for donation.

Dairy

		Refrigerated Life after Code Date	Frozen Life after Code Date
cheese	shredded, sliced or string cheese	2-4 weeks	6 months
	hard cheese, block	6 months	6-8 months
	processed	4 weeks	6 months
	Cream cheese	8 weeks	Not recommended
	Cottage or Ricotta	2 weeks	Not recommended
margarine		6 months	12 months
butter		8 weeks	1 year
eggs		4 weeks	Not recommended
eggbeaters/whites		10 days	1 year
yogurt		14 days	1-2 months
sour cream		14 days	not recommended
milk		5 days	not recommended
buttermilk		10 days	not recommended
cream	half & half	3 days	4 months
	heavy	10 days	3-4 months
	light	7 days	3-4 months
juice		3 weeks	8-12 months
yeast		2 years	7-10 years
ice cream		-	4 months

Extending the Shelf Life of Milk:

- Skim and non-fat milks tend to last a few days longer than regular because some bacteria will develop more slowly in them.
- The National Dairy Council says properly refrigerated milk usually can be kept for a few days past its “sell by” date but also notes that some milk processors guarantee their products for longer periods.
- Keeping milk cold is critical to maximizing its shelf life.
- Store milk on an interior refrigerator shelf rather than in the door, where the temperature fluctuates with frequent opening.

CANNED FOOD

Unopened Shelf Life After Code Date		
beans		3 years
fish: Tuna, salmon Sardines		3 years
crab		6 months
frosting		10 months
High Acid Food	fruit	1-2 years
	pickles, sauerkraut	1-2 years
	tomato based	1-2 years
Low Acid Food	gravy	2-3 years
	soup	2-3 years
	cream sauce	2-3 years
	vegetables	2-3 years
meat	poultry, beef	2-3 years
pie filling		3 years

Condiments

Unopened Shelf Life After Code Date		
BBQ sauce	bottled	1 year
honey	pasteurized	forever
jam, jelly, preserves		18 months
ketchup		18 months
molasses		2 years
olives		18-24 months
salad dressing	bottled	1 year
salad dressing	dry mix	2 years
gravy	dry mix	2 years
salsa		12-18 months
spaghetti sauce	canned or jarred	18 months

Dry Goods

Unopened Shelf Life After Code Date		
Pancake, brownie or cake mix		5 years
baking powder		5 years
baking soda		indefinite
beans	dry	30 years
bouillon		5 years
bread	commercially prepared	3 months frozen
cakes	commercially prepared	several months frozen
cereal	hot or cold	1-2 years
cookies	packaged	1-2 months
cornmeal		6-12 months
crackers		1-2 years
flour	white	5 years
fruit	dried	5 years
nuts		4-6 months
oatmeal	quick rolled or regular	30 years
oil	olive, veg, salad	1 year
pasta		30 years
peanut butter		4 years
popcorn		5 years
potatoes	instant flakes	7 years
rice	brown	6-8 months
	white	4-5 years
Shortening	vegetable	1 year
Stuffing Mix		6 months
sugar	Brown, white, confectioners	indefinite
toaster pastries	w fruit	6-12 months
wheat	hard or red	30 years

Extending the Life of Dry Products:

Most dry products can be stored for a VERY long time if they are in an air tight container and kept at room temperature or frozen. However, once the seal is broken, the clock starts ticking as an opened product.

Beverages

Unopened Shelf Life After Code Date		
cocoa mix		15 years
coffee creamer	powdered	2 years
coffee	ground	3-5 months
	instant	5-20 years
juice	bottle	9 months
	box	4-6 months
	canned	18 months
non refrigerated milk alternatives	evaporated	1 year
	non-fat dry	20 years
	shelf stable UHT	1 year
	sweetened condensed	1 year
	rice, soy, almond	1 month
tea		6-12 months
water		indefinite
Nutritional supplements	Boost, Ensure etc.	Nutritional value not optimal after expiration date

FROZEN

Unopened and Frozen After Code Date		
bread, bagels		3 months
chicken nuggets		2 months
desserts	baked	3-4 months
	cream pies	1-2 months
	fruit pies	6-8 months
dinners	w pork	3-4 months
	w beef, poultry, fish	6 months
dough	bread	1 month
	cookie	3 months
fish	breaded	4-6 months
juice	concentrate	2 years
soy meat substitutes		12-18 months
vegetables		8 months
waffles, pancakes		2 months
whipped topping		6 months
Ice cream		4 months

*when kept frozen there is no safety concern, but food may begin to lose taste and nutritional value

MEAT

		From code date when FRESH	From code date when FROZEN
fish- raw	salmon, mackerel	2 days	3-6 months
	cod, flounder, sole	2 days	12 months
	haddock, polluck	2 days	12 months
Fish- cooked		5-7 days	3-6 months
shrimp	raw	2 days	9 months
crab	legs	3-5 days	not recommended
oysters	shucked	1-2 days	3-4 months
lobster tails	raw	4-5 days	6-9 months
scallops	raw	1-2 days	3-6 months
beef	roast	3-5 days	1 year
	steak	3-5 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
pork	roast	3-5 days	1 year
	chops	3-5 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
lamb	roast	3-5 days	1 year
	steak/chops	3-5 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
poultry	whole cuts	2 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
bacon	unopened	2 weeks	6 months
	opened	1 week	2 months
chicken	fried	4 days	4 months
ham	unopened	2 weeks	1 year
	opened	1 week	1-2 months
hot dogs	unopened	2 weeks	9 months
lunch meats	deli or opened	3-5 days	not recommended
	unopened	2 weeks	1-2 months
pepperoni salami		1 month	6 months
sausage	raw	2 days	6 months
	smoked	1 week	9 months

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