An estimated 40 percent of food in the U.S. goes uneaten - enough to fill the Rose Bowl daily. This wasted food could nourish people and reduce hunger, which is why the food bank is committed to reducing food waste.

Much of this waste is due to confusion over food code dating. Food dates are voluntarily printed on food packaging by manufacturers to indicate optimal quality and freshness, and are neither required nor regulated by the federal government. These dates can include:

- **“Sell-by”**: Informs stores how long to display product for sale.
- **“Use-by”**: The last date recommended for use of product for highest quality and freshness as determined by manufacturer.
- **“Best if used by (or before)”**: Recommended for best flavor or quality
- **“Closed or coded”**: Packing numbers used by the manufacturer.
The following table provides guidance on how to use the dates on packaging. Remember, this is just a guide – it’s up to you, the consumer, to use your best judgement. Many foodborne pathogens cannot be seen, tasted or smelled, so when in doubt, throw it out. By being informed, we can waste less food and feed more of our neighbors.

**Food Coding Guidance**

### Food Type
- Canned Goods - High Acid
- Canned Goods - Low Acid
- Dry Goods
- Frozen Meats and Sides
- Dairy
- Produce
- Eggs
- Bread and Bakery

### Examples

- Canned goods
- Canned goods
- Dry goods
- Frozen meats
- Frozen meats
- Dairy
- Produce
- Eggs
- Bread and bakery

### Guideline - Quality
- Can be consumed 12-18 months after date
- Can be consumed 2-5 years after date
- Can be consumed 1-2 years after date
- If frozen before or on best-by date, safe for consumption indefinitely. Once thawed, consume within the week
- Can be consumed 1-3 weeks after date
- 3 days for high perishable (berries/mushrooms) an up to 3 months for harder items (potatoes/winter squash)
- Can be consumed 3-5 weeks after date
- Can be consumed 1-3 weeks after date

### Guideline - Physical Condition
- Discard if heavily dented, rusting, punctured or missing label
- Discard if heavily dented, rusting, punctured or missing label
- Discard if packaging is ripped
- Discard if packaging is ripped
- Discard if product emits sour/foul odor, appears chunky or off-color
- Discard if signs of mold/foul odor
- Discard if shells are cracked or broken
- Discard if signs of mold growth

* The only food item regulated by the Federal Government for safety and quality is infant formula.