

FDF Guide to Date Marking

There are **two** types of date marks:

‘Use by ...’

informs consumers about
food safety

‘Use by’ dates must be declared on food products which, from a microbiological point of view, are **highly perishable** and are therefore likely after a short period to constitute an immediate **danger to human health**.

After the ‘use by’ date food is deemed unsafe and it is a criminal offence to sell it.

Food should be only consumed up until its ‘use by’ date, but not after.

‘Best before ...’

informs consumers about
food quality

‘Best before’ dates are used on other food products to show minimum durability; being the date that the properly stored food can reasonably be expected to **retain its specific properties**, after which it will not be in **optimal condition** (e.g. loss of flavour and texture).

Food can be consumed after its ‘best before’ date, but it may no longer be at its best quality. Before throwing away, do a sensory assessment to judge the food’s condition.

The Food Information to Consumers (FIC) Regulation (No. 1169/2011), which prescribes food labelling requirements, makes it mandatory for food products (unless specifically exempt) to declare: ‘the date of minimum durability [i.e. best before] or the ‘use by’ date’ and ‘any special storage conditions and/or conditions of use’.

A date mark is not required for a specific list of food products, which includes:

- most fresh fruit and vegetables,
- vinegar,
- cooking salt,
- solid sugar and
- chewing gum.

There is no definitive list of which foods or category of food should carry a particular type of date mark.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the manufacturer to declare the appropriate date mark, which takes into account the perishability and microbiological stability of the food product.

The use of ‘*display until*’ and ‘*sell by*’ dates are not recommended industry best practice. They were previously used by some retailers to help with stock control purposes only and are not aimed at consumers.

Additional Resources:

- Food Standards Agency Information ([link](#))
- Defra Food Labelling Guidance ([link](#))
- FIC Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 ([link](#))
- European Commission Infographic ([link](#))
- FDF Setting Shelf-Life Guidance ([link](#))
- European Commission Stop Food Waste ([link](#))
- WRAP Food & Drink Waste ([link](#))
- WRAP Labelling Guidance ([link](#))