

Ohio SNAP-Ed Adult & Teen Programs

It's All about the Date

Task Topic:	Food Shopping
Task Title:	It's All about the Date
Teaching Message(s):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use food labels to make better choices <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plan meals ahead of time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minimize worry that food might run out before more can be bought
Resources:	Adapted from <i>ChooseMyPlate.gov</i> , <i>Dietary Guidelines</i> , USDA Food Safety & Inspection Service, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Dairy Council of California, Michigan State University

Objectives for the Task:

1. List the 3 main types of dates that can be found on a food product.
2. Explain the difference between a “sell by” date and a “best if used by” date.
3. Name two ways to extend the shelf life of food beyond its food package date.

Materials needed for the Task (including Handouts):

- Fact Sheet – Decoding Food Product Dates
- Food Product Cards (printed in color on card stock)

General Materials List:

- Flip chart paper
- Post-it notes
- Index cards
- Thought box
- Markers
- Pens
- Highlighters
- Masking tape
- Name tags
- VOICE principles
- Participant evaluation forms

Preparation:

- Arrange Food Product Cards into sets. (Depending on class size, each Food Product Card Product set should contain 1 “sell by” product and a mixture of 2-3 other products.) You need enough card sets for each small group of participants to get several product cards.
- Set out the pre-arranged Food Product Card sets on a table. On flip chart paper, write down these questions:
 - What type of date is reflected on the food product?
 - What does this date mean?
 - How long do you have to use the food product for best quality?
 - Name one thing you can do with the food product to avoid throwing it out.



Key Points to Review:

- Introduce yourself. Give brief description of the program (program name, length of sessions, duration of program).
- Include your purpose as the facilitator (i.e. to introduce ideas that are supported by research, to give them the tools to make informed decisions about areas that affect their health & nutritional needs, and to identify topics that might be covered based on the curricula used in the program).
- Review the V.O.I.C.E. Principles.
- Ask participants to sign in on the SNAP-Ed sign-in sheet.
- Remember to pass out the appropriate participant evaluation form at the end of the session, making sure to read the questions out loud to the participants.

Transition:

Last time we met, we discussed.... We also Who would like to share an example of ...?

Today, we will talk about food product dating. We'll learn about what the dates on food packages mean and how we can use this information to reduce food waste. This, in turn, can help us save money. Before we begin, let's turn our attention to physical activity. Many Americans' lifestyles rob them of critical opportunities for movement. We have remotes for the television, detergents that take away the effort of scrubbing out stains, and automatic dishwashers for our dirty dishes. We can even drive up to the pharmacy to pick up our prescriptions instead of walking into the store. But these conveniences may be doing us more harm than good, because they encourage us to be more sedentary. What are some ways to build activity back into the day? Call out your examples.

Physical activity guidelines can be found at the following websites:

- Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion: www.health.gov/paguidelines/
- CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html>
- President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition: www.fitness.gov/be-active/physical-activity-guidelines-for-Americans/

Anchor

Consider this scenario:

You want to make breakfast. You open up your refrigerator and pull out the eggs. The date on the egg carton has a date that says, "Sell by" and you notice the date is from 2 weeks ago.

What do you do with the eggs? Do you prepare them? Use them for baking? Or toss them out? Who would like to share?

Add

Pass out a copy of the fact sheet – Decoding Food Product Dates to each participant.

A recent report by Rethink Food Waste Through Economics and Data looked at 27 cost-effective solutions and identified date labeling as among the top strategies for reducing



unnecessary food waste. Given that the largest portion of the \$162 billion cost of wasted food comes from consumers (more than restaurants or grocery stores), understanding what the dates on food packages mean can save us a lot of money.

There are 3 basic types of dates on food packages: Best if Used By/Before (or Use By), Sell By, and Can Codes. The fact sheet I passed out presents some information about these dates. *Invite participants to read about each type of date from the fact sheet.*

It is important to point out that these dates pertain to the product's **quality** and are not an indicator of food safety. Perishable foods may spoil, but safe food storage and handling is the best safeguard to keeping your food safe.

Let's look at specific types of foods, beginning with milk. According to the Dairy Council of California, when buying milk, make sure the sell-by date has not passed. Consider if you will be able to drink it within a few days of its sell-by date. At home, store the milk away from the door, at a refrigerated temperature between 38-40 degrees. If the milk in your refrigerator is a few days past the sell-by date on the carton, you can safely drink it as long as it smells good.

What about eggs? As with milk, it is recommended to buy eggs before the sell-by date on the carton. Store them in their original container away from the refrigerator door. For best quality, use the eggs within 3-5 weeks of the date you purchased them. (The sell-by date may pass in this time period, but the eggs are still safe to use.)

The sell-by date on packages of fresh meat are intended for the food retailer to know when the product has to be removed from their shelf and disposed of instead of being sold. Follow these tips from the USDA Food Safety & Inspection Service for storage and use of meat products:

- Purchase the product before the date expires.
- If perishable, take the food home immediately after purchase and refrigerate it promptly. Freeze it if you can't use it within 1-2 days.
- Once a perishable product is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires because foods kept frozen continuously are safe indefinitely.

Most food retailers will mark down the price of a product if the sell-by date is near. That gives consumers the chance to purchase a product that is still acceptable from a safety and quality standpoint at a bargain, provided they use it or freeze it before the date passes. So if you have a package of meat that is approaching the sell-by date, cook it and use it later in the week, or toss it in the freezer for use within a few months.

Codes on the bottoms of canned foods are for product tracking. This allows food manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as to locate their products in the event of a recall. These codes, which appear as a series of letters and/or numbers, might refer to the date or time of manufacture. They aren't meant to be thought of as sell-by dates. Canned goods may also display "open" or calendar dates. Usually these are "best if used by" dates for peak quality. High-acid canned foods (such as tomatoes or fruit) will keep their best quality for 12



to 18 months, while low-acid canned foods (such as meats or vegetables) will retain their best quality for 2 to 5 years.

By keeping these tips in mind, you can avoid unnecessarily tossing out food just because of the date on the food package, saving you money and reducing food waste.

Apply

Divide participants into small groups. Depending on the number of groups you have, give each group 3-5 food product cards.

We are going to look at some food products in small groups. Each group will look at several food product packages. In your groups, discuss the questions I have written down on the flip chart paper:

- What type of date is reflected on the food product?
- What does this date mean?
- How long do you have to use the food product for best quality?
- Name one thing you can do with the food product to avoid throwing it out.

When participants are done with this activity, draw their attention back to the large group.

Who would like to share what they discussed about one of their products with the rest of the group? What was one thing you learned from doing this activity?

Away

When you go home, look in your refrigerator or pantry for different food products. Check the dates on the packages. How can you use them to ensure best quality?

Facilitator's Notes:

Facilitator's Checklist:

- ☐ Have I gathered all of the pertinent materials needed for the lesson?
- ☐ Did I spend the requisite amount of time covering each targeted message?
- ☐ Did I apply the principles of adult learning to my program?
- ☐ Did I create a comfortable and functional learning atmosphere?
- ☐ Did I fill out a Program Log with the necessary program information?
- ☐ Did I ensure that all participants signed the sign-in sheet?
- ☐ Did I read the survey instrument out loud to the participants?
- ☐ Did I collect all requisite survey instruments needed for today's lesson?



Decoding Food Product Dates

“Sell-By” Date

Tells the store how long a food product should be displayed on the shelves as being for sale. Buy the product before that date is reached to ensure adequate storage time once purchased



“Best if Used By” or “Before” Date

A date that is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase-by or food safety date.



“Use By” Date

The last date recommended for product use while at peak quality. The date is determined by the food manufacturer and does not indicate spoilage or safety.

“Closed” or “Coded” Date

A packing number for use by the food manufacturer.

Source: USDA Food Safety & Inspection Service



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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HUMAN ECOLOGY

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Eggs



Pork Roast



Spaghetti



Thyme



Applesauce



Bread



Graham Crackers



Liquid Eggs



Milk



Mushrooms



Orange Juice



Salad Mix



Pasta Sauce



Dried fruit



Strawberry Milk