Use By – Sell By – Expiration Dates Notice

The Cougar Cupboard follows both the USDA and FDA's guidelines when it comes to distributing foods in both our food pantry and our backpack program. The following information is from the USDA's FSIS (Food Safety Inspection Service).

What Date-Labeling Phrases are Used?

There are no uniform or universally accepted descriptions used on food labels for open dating in the United States. As a result, there are a wide variety of phrases used on labels to describe quality dates.

Examples of commonly used phrases:

- A **"Best if Used By/Before"** date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A **"Sell-By"** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.
- A **"Use-By"** date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula as described below.
- A **"Freeze-By"** date indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

What Date-Labeling Phrase Does FSIS Recommend?

USDA estimates that 30 percent of the food supply is lost or wasted at the retail and consumer levels.[3] One source of food waste arises from consumers or retailers throwing away wholesome food because of confusion about the meaning of dates displayed on the label. To reduce consumer confusion and wasted food, FSIS recommends that food manufacturers and retailers that apply product dating use a "Best if Used By" date. Research shows that this phrase conveys to consumers that the product will be of best quality if used by the calendar date shown. Foods not exhibiting signs of spoilage should be wholesome and may be sold, purchased, donated and consumed beyond the labeled "Best if Used By" date.

If a product you receive has a date that is "past date", please be assured that we are following the specific guidelines set forth for food safety. Each item we distribute is checked for quality and safety. Also, our food is consistently stored at a cool temperature to ensure the items that we distribute are the best quality possible. Be assured that any refrigerated or frozen items have been maintained at the appropriate temperature as we are required to monitor our equipment for temperatures daily.

Please visit https://www.fsis.usda.gov/ or www.fda.gov for more information

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reach out to cougarcupboard@nrwcs.org should you have any questions/concerns.

Thank you!