



FMI – GMA Product Code Dating Initiative

Grocery manufacturers and retailers have joined together to streamline and standardize the wording accompanying the date labels on packages to offer greater clarity regarding the quality and safety of products. The new industry-wide effort launched by the Grocery Manufacturers Association and Food Marketing Institute will help reduce consumer confusion over dates on the product label and potentially help consumers avoid unnecessary food waste.

From More Than 10 Different Product Label Dates to Two Standard Phrases

Currently, packages can include date label phrases such as Sell By, Best Before, Expires On, Use By, Best By, Born On and Enjoy By and others. Numerous studies have shown that consumers are confused with this myriad of labels and are unclear exactly what guidance the date is offering.

This voluntary national initiative streamlines more than 10 different and confusing date labels on consumer products packaging down to just two standard phrases.

“**BEST If Used By**” or “**BEST If Used or Freeze By**” quality phrasing will indicate to consumers that after the specified date, the product is safe to use or consume, but that it may have exceeded the threshold of its optimal taste or performance. For example, the quality of the product taste or texture may have diminished slightly or it may not have the full vitamin content indicated on the package.

“**USE By**” or “**USE or Freeze By**” safety phrasing will inform customers that these products should be consumed by the date listed on the package. This date label is for perishable products with potential safety implications over time. After the date on the “**USE By**” label has passed, the product should not be used or consumed and instead should be discarded.

Widespread Industry Adoption Urged

Retailers and manufacturers are encouraged to immediately begin phasing in the common wording, with widespread adoption urged by the summer of 2018. Broad industry adoption of this new voluntary standard will occur over time so companies have flexibility to make the changes in a way that ensures consistency across their product categories and doesn't create unintentional food waste.

Can Help Reduce Food Waste

Product date labeling changes may result in reduced consumer food waste, but clearing up this confusion is just one of several ways to combat the issue moving forward. About 44 percent of food waste sent to landfills comes from consumers, and statistics show that addressing consumer confusion around product date labeling could reduce total national food waste by just 8 percent.