

# WHAT DO THE DATES MEAN?

According to the USDA, there is no uniform or universally accepted system used for food dating in the United States, other than for infant formula.

USDA website: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>

## Below are some general definitions of “dates” per the USDA:

- “Production”:** This is the date when the food was packaged or processed.
- “Pull or sell by”:** This is the day that the manufacturer wants the product pulled from store shelves – product may be pulled for marketing or inventory reasons that do not pertain to quality (seasonal items may be an example).
- “Use by”:** This indicates the last date suggested for use of the product in terms of peak quality or freshness.
- “Best if used by”:** This indicates how long the product will maintain best quality or flavor (it is still safe to eat after this date but may have taste/texture changes).
- “Expiration”:** This is the date by which the manufacturer has determined that the product should be eaten.

## The RI Food Bank guidelines include:

- While the Food Bank generally does not distribute product past date, **dry product** dates *may* be extended for 6 months beyond the expiration code provided items remain in good condition and have been stored in a cool, clean, dry place.
- **Frozen items** are distributed by the Food Bank within 1 year of the sell by date with extension exceptions by the manufacturer.
- **Baby food and nutritional supplements** (ex. “Boost”, “Ensure”) *must be distributed and used by expiration/use by dates*. Infant formula “use-by” dates are required and regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

## Additionally, for your information:

- **Low-acid canned goods** - 2 to 5 years (canned meat and poultry, stews, soups except tomato, pasta products, potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, beans, beets, peas, and pumpkin).
- **High-acid canned goods** - 12 to 18 months (tomato products, fruits, sauerkraut and foods in vinegar-based sauces or dressings).

***Agencies should always rotate stock to ensure product is distributed in a timely manner.***

Questions? Contact **Customer Service** or **Community Programs** @ 401-942-6325.