

Date Labeling and Lot-Coding
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Questions and Answers

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Below you will find the summary of the questions and answers (Q & A) from the live Webinar Series. For clarity and brevity, the live session of Q & A was trimmed from the original recording. Please keep in mind that this document is meant as a job aide. It does not create or confer any right for or on any person and does not operate to bind federal, state, or local food safety regulatory agencies. If you have questions concerning interpretation or application of various portions, please reach out to your Regional Specialist for assistance. Current Regional Specialist and District Supervisor maps are linked on the main BEHS INFO HUB page.

Q. What's a Julian Date?

- Three-digit number assigned to each date. It doesn't roll over month to month but keeps adding to that number for the year.
- Example: January 1st = 001 and February 1st = 032.
- A lot of Manufactured Food firms use a Julian date for their processing records.
- A Julian date assigns a unique number to each date, to avoid ambiguity and make software calculations simpler.

Q. Is lot coding required for acid food?

- An acid food is a food that doesn't have a significant portion of naturally low acid ingredients.
- A common acid food is barbeque sauce (best example). Tomato sauce can be an acid food depending on formulation.
- Lot coding would not be required for acid food. However, we would strongly recommend using a lot code because the item could be on the shelf for a long time.

Q. Just to clarify if a facility has a bottle of thousand island dressing that has a best by date in 2022, when they open that bottle would they need to date mark it for the 7 days?

- Ask yourself, is that a PHF (Potentially Hazardous Food) once you open it?
- If it's something commercially processed – typically going to have a pH that is 4.6 or below, so it won't be classified as a PHF. For this particular example, you would not need to date mark the bottle for 7 days.

Q. So is it fair to say that the "refrigerate after opening" on the bottle is for quality, not food safety? So, they could arguably leave it out of refrigeration?

- This is usually the case, but you have to look at each food individually to determine if it meets the definition of a PHF.
- A commercially processed salad dressing will have a low pH, so it's not a PHF. We can't hold to the time/temp standard for regulation.
- For most things, "refrigerate after opening" is just another barrier to keep that product from spoiling or inhibiting growth of mold/bacteria.

Q. I am seeking clarification because I have a complaint of a person reporting illness that they believe is related to the dressing.

- There are a couple different routes you can go with that: You can take it as a complaint to FDA or if it's manufactured in MO, we can follow up on it as a complaint for the manufacturer.

Q. What do you do if you encounter something like hotdogs at a store and quite a bit of time has gone passed the best by date?

- The first thing I recommend to do is to bring it to the attention of the manager and get them to remove the product from the shelf voluntarily if you can.
- You can't only go by the best by date to dispose of products. Check for more clues: evidence that frozen food was thawed, damaged packaging, missing labels, swelling of packaging, other evidence of adulteration.

Q. Would there be a difference between a commercially processed package such as Oscar Meyer vs one that was package under inspection at a smaller butcher shop operation?

- Probably not, if we're only looking at the manufacturers use-by date.
- If it's for date marking, that's going to be a different conversation.
- In assessing a product well-past its date, you can look for change in appearance, odor, consumer complaints on taste, packaging bulges, off-gassing in conjunction with date.

Q. What about packaged deli lunch meats?

- If these haven't been opened yet – same thing, going to have to find other issues with that other than the date.
 - Examples of evidence that indicates a product is spoiled include but are not limited to: swelling or damaged packaging, discoloration of product, slimy appearance.

Useful links:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-107>
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-modernization-act-fsma/fsma-final-rule-requirements-additional-traceability-records-certain-foods>

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-113>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022030221000527#fig5>

2022 Model FDA Food Code

<https://www.fda.gov/media/164194/download?attachment>

Annex 3 contains the "whys"

Public Health Reasons/Administrative Guidelines

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

Drug Expiration Dates – Q & A: <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/pharmaceutical-quality-resources/expiration-dates-questions-and-answers>

FDA News Release: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/usda-fda-seek-information-about-food-date-labeling-aim-provide-further-clarity-transparency-and-cost>

Dietary Supplement Labeling Guide: Chapter I. General Dietary Supplement Labeling: <https://www.fda.gov/food/dietary-supplements-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/dietary-supplement-labeling-guide-chapter-i-general-dietary-supplement-labeling#1-14>