

Labelling – date marking, storage conditions and directions for use

Standard 1.2.5 of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code) outlines how packaged foods must be marked to indicate their shelf life.

The NSW Food Authority is responsible for enforcing the labelling and information provisions of the Code and the NSW Food Act 2003. This includes the requirement for essential information to be accurately communicated to consumers.

The requirements

The Code sets out a system for date marking packaged foods. This includes stating how these foods must be date marked to show their shelf life when stored according to specific storage instructions.

The manufacturer is usually responsible for determining and substantiating the date mark, as well as stating any conditions required to ensure the food will keep for the period indicated by the date mark, such as 'refrigerate after opening'.

Where directions for use of a food are required for health and safety reasons, such as cooking instructions, these also need to be included on the label.

Use-by date

A 'use-by' date is the date after which it is estimated the intact package of food, if stored under the conditions specified on the label, should not be consumed because of health and safety reasons.

It is illegal to sell food past its 'use-by' date.

Best before date

Foods marked 'best before' are safe to be consumed past their best before date provided they are otherwise fit for human consumption. These foods can be expected to retain their colour, taste, texture and flavour up to the best before date if they have been stored as directed, and are in an unopened package.

Foods marked 'best before' can be sold after that date if the food is not deteriorated or perished.

Foods not requiring a date mark

Foods that do not require a date mark include:

- when the 'best before' date is 2 years or more
- an individual portion of ice cream or ice confection
- foods contained in a small package (under 100 square centimetres), except where the food should have a use-by date
- foods that are exempt from the general labelling provisions of the Code (see factsheet [Labelling – General requirements](#) (PDF, 135 KB)).

More information

- Visit foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
- Phone 1300 552 406
- Email food.contact@dpi.nsw.gov.au