

90 percent of Americans confused by 'use by' dates on food

Dylan Stableford, Yahoo! News 16 hours ago

Ninety percent of Americans say they've prematurely discarded food because they misinterpreted the "sell by," "use by" and "best before" dates on products, and the confusion is costing consumers billions, [a new study finds](#).

According to the study, conducted by the Natural Resources Defense Council and Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, many Americans incorrectly assume the date stamped on packaged food indicates when it will go bad instead of what it really is — a suggestion by the manufacturer of peak freshness.

The current system of expiration dates is misleading, the researchers say.

"Expiration dates are in need of some serious myth-busting because they're leading us to waste money and throw out perfectly good food, along with all of the resources that went into growing it," Dana Gunders, an NRDC staff scientist, [told the Los Angeles Times](#). "Phrases like 'sell by,' 'use by,' and 'best before' are poorly regulated, misinterpreted and leading to a false confidence in food safety."

According to a survey by the Food Marketing Institute cited by researchers, such confusion leads nine out of 10 Americans to needlessly throw away food. The survey found 90 percent of Americans "at least occasionally throw food away prematurely because they mistakenly interpret the date label to mean their food is unsafe" — and 25 percent say they always discard food on or before that date.

The researchers blame "a lack of binding federal standards, and the resultant state and local variability in date labeling rules" for the inconsistency in date-labeling practices, "including whether manufacturers affix a date label in the first place, how they choose which label phrase to apply, varying meanings for the same phrase, and the wide range of methods by which the date on a product is determined."

In other words, "it's a mess," Gunders wrote in a post announcing the report. "And that mess is leading to a whole lot of perfectly good food going to waste."

In 2012, [an NRDC study found](#) as much as 40 percent of the country's food supply goes uneaten. The cost of that wasted food? Roughly \$165 billion, including \$900 million in "expired" food. A family of four, the study found, spends an average of \$455 a year on food it doesn't eat.

The researchers recommend making "sell by" dates invisible to the consumer, and have the food industry establish a standard, uniform labeling system.

In the meantime, consumers should educate themselves about food safety and ["demystify](#)

THE REFRIGERATOR

Demystified

Up to 40 percent of food in the U.S. is never eaten. Stocking your fridge with these tips will help make a dent in food waste, saving you money while you do it.



NEVER LET ICE BUILD UP
It forces your fridge to use more energy.

THE UPPER SHELVES

THE UPPER SHELVES ARE SLIGHTLY WARMER THAN BELOW AND ARE A GREAT PLACE TO STORE ITEMS THAT DON'T HAVE A HIGH SAFETY RISK

GREAT FOR LEFTOVERS, DRINKS, READY-TO-EAT FOODS LIKE YOGURT OR CHEESE

THE LOWER SHELVES

FOODS WITH A HIGHER SAFETY RISK ARE BETTER OFF IN COLDEST SECTION.

THE BOTTOM SHELF IS THE COLDEST PLACE IN THE FRIDGE. STORE MEAT, POULTRY AND FISH HERE IN TRAYS TO PREVENT THEM FROM DRIPPING.

HIGH & LOW HUMIDITY DRAWERS



CARROTS, LEAFY GREENS, SPINACH, ARUGULA, BASIL, BROCCOLI, ETC...

Put most veggies, particularly those that might wilt, in the high humidity drawer.

PEARS, APPLES, GRAPES, MUSHROOMS, PEPPERS, AVOCADOS, BERRIES, ETC...

Put fruits in the low humidity drawer, along with vegetables that have a tendency to breakdown and rot.

The adjustable levers on the crisper drawers change humidity levels.

If your refrigerator has these, set one to high (closed, less air coming in) and one to low (open, more air coming in).



LEAVING THE FRIDGE DOOR OPEN



when you pour milk into your cereal wastes 7% of a fridge's energy, according to Home Energy Magazine.



That's the same as 830-2000 60W light bulbs each year!"

THE REFRIGERATOR DOOR IS THE WARMEST PART OF THE FRIDGE. GETTING A NICE DOSE OF WARM AIR EVERY TIME THE DOOR IS OPENED.

It's a good place for condiments. It is not a good place for anything that is even moderately perishable. Though some models may have a compartment for eggs in the door, it's probably a better idea to keep them on one of the main shelves.



Because bacteria grow most rapidly between 40° and 140°, your fridge should be set to maintain a temperature of 40° or below



The fridge needs air to circulate to be efficient. Allow enough space in between foods so that cold air can circulate all around.

Find out more about reducing food waste at www.nrdc.org/food/wasted-food.asp