

Dairy UK Position Paper

Date marking

November 2017

Background

WRAP, in conjunction with the Food Standards Agency and Defra Labelling, have updated the official UK guidelines on date marking of food products. These guidelines provide best practice to food businesses on how to apply date marks and storage instructions to guarantee product safety and quality as well as to minimise food waste at the household level.

WRAP are calling on retailers and manufacturers to:

- Review the choice of date label on products that currently carry a 'Use By' date and which are wasted in high volumes (such as yogurts and fresh milk).
- Review and where possible extend the shelf-life given to consumers, both when 'closed' (i.e. before opening) and 'open' (i.e. after opening) on products wasted in large volumes (such as fresh meat, milk and pre-prepared foods).
- Continue to implement WRAP/FSA Guidance on refrigeration and freezing advice, across all products that can be frozen at home, including maintaining or reinstating use of the snowflake logo.

Dairy UK Position – for industry use

- Date marking practices within the British dairy sector are based on food safety principles contained in EU law and are implemented using sound and robust scientific evidence.
- Fresh pasteurised milk is a source of nutrients for bacterial growth and a 'use by' date – necessary for foods which are likely to be compromised microbiologically after a short period of time - is designed to protect the consumer from pathogens and spoilage bacteria. *Listeria monocytogenes* is able to grow to unsafe levels before the organoleptic properties of the milk are affected, therefore consumers should not be expected to make a decision on the safety of the food based on sensory analysis.
- In the case of yogurts, the appropriate durability indication depends on the product characteristics and the particular manufacturing and packing procedures. This is reflected in advice provided both in the new WRAP guidance and within Dairy UK's "*Guidance on the Application of Date Marks and Storage Instructions for the Dairy Industry*" published in 2012.
- With regards to closed and open life, British dairy companies undertake internal testing of products to ensure that they are safe throughout their shelf life (including once the product has been opened) and to assess their bacteriological quality and organoleptic acceptability. This testing involves introducing temperature fluctuations to mimic certain conditions, for example transport home from point of sale and temporary storage outside of the fridge. Another challenge taken into consideration is that most domestic fridges in the UK do not operate at the correct temperature. This process is carried out through strict measurable criteria in order to ensure that the consumer is adequately protected.

- With regards to refrigeration and freezing advice on pack, the British dairy industry is committed to applying these in line with official UK recommendations whenever possible.
- With WRAP and Defra's support, Dairy UK published in 2012 a guidance on date marking for dairy products with expertise from dairy technical experts from across the UK. This is currently being reviewed and will include further recommendations on measures to reduce food waste, including guidelines for redistribution of dairy products.
- Food waste is a genuine issue which requires cross-sectoral collaboration. Dairy UK is actively working with its members to explore potential solutions to food waste which do not compromise the safety and quality of dairy products placed on the market.

Media Statement – for external use

- Dairy UK welcomes the new UK guidelines on date marking developed by WRAP in conjunction with the Food Standards Agency and Defra Labelling. Date marking is an essential tool for protecting the safety and quality of products placed on the market, and can also play a role in reducing food waste at the household level.
- Current date marking practices within the British dairy sector are based on food safety principles contained in EU law and are implemented using sound and robust scientific evidence. Both the choice of date mark (either "use by" or "best before") and the determination of the shelf life are reached using full knowledge of the microbiological risks in order to protect the consumer.
- With WRAP's support, Dairy UK published a guidance document on date marking and storage instructions for dairy products in 2012 to prevent unnecessary food waste while guaranteeing that consumers could safely enjoy their favourite dairy foods. This is currently being reviewed and will feature new recommendations for reducing food waste, including guidelines for redistribution of dairy products.
- The British dairy industry is working closely with WRAP to ensure the dairy industry is as sustainable as possible by identifying solutions for reducing food waste without compromising the safety and quality of its products.