



Georgia Department of Agriculture Food Safety Division

FOOD SAFETY FACT SHEET

Date Marking

While refrigeration significantly slows the growth of most microbes, the growth of some bacteria, such as *Listeria monocytogenes*, is not stopped by refrigeration. The growth of pathogenic bacteria to dangerous levels can result when potentially hazardous foods are held at refrigerated temperatures for extended periods. Date marking is the mechanism used to control the time and temperature combinations for cold holding and control the risk of bacterial growth in refrigerated foods. To monitor and limit refrigeration time, refrigerated ready-to-eat potentially hazardous foods must be date marked to ensure that the food is either consumed or discarded within seven days.

Food must be date marked if it is:

- Prepared on-site or commercially processed, and
- Refrigerated, and
- Potentially hazardous, and
- Ready-to-eat, and
- Held for more than 24 hours

- ❖ The day the food was prepared, or the day commercial processed food was opened, counts as day 1. **Add 6 days to day 1 to equal 7 days.**
- ❖ Mark the food with the date by which it must be consumed or discarded. The date marked may not exceed a manufacturer's use by date.
- ❖ Allow seven days if held at 41° F or below
- ❖ When food is removed from the freezer, mark it with a consume-by date that is seven days minus the length of time food was refrigerated before it was frozen.
- ❖ Any item made from a date marked ingredient(s) shall retain and carry as a date mark, the date marking of the earliest or first prepared ingredient.
- ❖ The date mark **cannot** be extended for rewrapping or repackaging.
- ❖ It is not the intent for consumer *requested* portions from bulk to be date marked, such as ½ lb sliced deli ham.

Exceptions: Date marking does **not** apply to the following foods prepared and packaged by a food processing plant:

- Deli salads such as ham salad, seafood salad, chicken salad, egg salad, pasta salad, potato salad, and macaroni salad manufactured in accordance with 21 CFR 110. (All deli salads prepared and packaged in a food processing plant are exempt from date marking; however, deli salads prepared in a food establishment **DO** require date marking).
- Hard cheeses containing ≤39% moisture as defined in 21 CFR 133, such as cheddar, gruyere, parmesan, romano.
- Semi-soft cheeses containing between 40% and 50% moisture such as blue, edam, gouda, Monterey jack.
- Cultured dairy products as defined in 21 CFR 131 such as yogurt, sour cream, buttermilk.
- Preserved fish products such as pickled herring, dried or salted cod, other acidified fish products, 21 CFR 114.
- Shelf stable, dry fermented sausages, such as pepperoni and Genoa.
- Shelf stable salt-cured products such as prosciutto and Parma (ham).