
ASSOCIATION OF FOOD AND DRUG OFFICIALS

2015

RESOLUTION NUMBER 2015-2

Submitted by: AFDO Board of Directors

Date: March 19, 2015

Concerning, Date Labeling of Food

Whereas, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO] estimates that the amount of food loss and waste on a global scale is about one-third of the food produced for human consumption, which translates into 1.3 billion metric tons of food produced for human consumption or \$1 trillion wasted per year (FAO 2011), and

Whereas, the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (USDA/ERS) estimated that in the United States in 2010 about 133 billion pounds of food estimated at \$161.6 billion in retail value, which is about a third (31 percent) of the 430 billion pounds of edible food available at the retail and consumer levels, was not eaten as a result of being wasted (Buzby and others 2014), and

Whereas, the inconsistent use of date labeling terms such as sell-by, best-by, best-before, and use-by dates contributes to a general misunderstanding about how or whether dates on labels relate to food quality or safety, and

Whereas, this general misunderstanding of date labeling also leads to significant food waste, misapplication of limited government resources, and unnecessary financial burden for the consumer and the food industry, and

Whereas, this general misunderstanding may also lead to potential food safety risk in regards to perishable foods (Newsome and others 2014), detrimental impacts on the environment (e.g., land, water, energy, and climate change) and a weakened ability to address food security (Buzby and others 2011; FAO 2011; FAO 2013a,b; FAO 2014), and

Whereas, there are an estimated 805 million hungry people worldwide (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2014) and an estimated growth in the world's population from about 7 billion to nearly 9.6 billion by 2050 (UN 2013) creating a demand for food that will be 70% greater than it is today (FAO 2009), and

Whereas, AFDO participated in a Committee that developed a research paper entitled "Applications and Perceptions of Date Labeling of Food" that called for collaboration to address the challenges that food manufacturers, retailers, government officials, consumers and other stakeholders face as a result of the current date labeling situation, and

Whereas, AFDO supports the recommendations from the research paper that include:

Establish Date Labeling Uniformity

- A simple workable solution needs to be developed to alleviate the challenges that date labeling causes for food manufacturers, retailers, government officials, and consumers, and other stakeholders.
- The food industry should align to develop a more consistent or single best practices date-marking system that takes into consideration on-package storage instructions.

Educate Consumers

- Providing clear, simple consumer direction on food quality and safety and the meaning of date labeling would improve food waste behavior.

Reexamine Regulatory Enforcement

- Regulatory agencies should revisit the emphasis placed on the issue of food date labeling at retail and, where appropriate, shift excessive resources placed on food quality date labeling to more significant health and safety risks.
- Coordination of Federal and State approaches to date labeling, while allowing for collaborative industry-led development of a solution to achieve uniformity, would increase consistency across labels and decrease confusion, including at the regulatory level.

Conduct More Research on Indicator Technologies

- Additional research to evaluate and further develop indicator technologies, such as time – temperature monitoring devices, and implement other improvements along the supply chain to monitor temperature handling and storage information could help better gauge true shelf life and reduce food waste, especially that of fresh produce.

Therefore be it resolved, that AFDO inform FDA, USDA/FSIS, and state food safety programs of its support of the recommendations from the research paper entitled “Applications and Perceptions of Date Labeling of Food” and of our desire to seek uniform date labeling requirements for this country, and be it further

Resolved, that AFDO inform FDA and USDA/FSIS of our willingness to work with them in order to develop uniform date labeling requirements.