GUIDE TO
SAFE FOOD SORTING
Community Partner Edition
This guide is to be used as a reference for Community Partners to determine what to keep and what to throw away when sorting through packaged food items according to both product dates and quality of packaging.

The Food Safety and HACCP Committee (FSHC) of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County developed the Guide by using information from USDA, Feeding America and Food Keeper Guide (Food Marketing Institute and Cornell University).

The FSHC took into account the amount of time product may stay in storage at a Community Partner site. When selecting criteria to be used when evaluating food, the FSHC used food safety as the overriding standard; the next consideration was food quality followed by having as much food as possible available for our Community Partners and the people they serve.
GUIDE TO
SAFE FOOD SORTING

EVALUATING
PACKAGING
GUIDE TO SAFE FOOD SORTING

SEALS

Ensure that tamper-proof seals are intact

Discard the item if the seal is pierced, not adhered to the edge of the container, or if there is visual evidence of product contamination.

Look for plastic or metal caps on bottles attached by small links to a ring fastened around the bottle neck. If these connecting links are broken, discard the item.

If shrink-wrap around bottles is completely broken, discard the item. If the seal is slightly damaged but shows no tampering was possible, retain the product.

A paper seal may be glued around the cap and neck of a bottle. If this paper is torn, discard the item.
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CANS

Look for these red-flag indicators of a “bad can”

Dispose of cans with sharp dents on the squeezed lid seams. If the dent extends below the lid’s seam and into the side of the can, or if the dent peels back the lid seam or bottom. Accept cans with a long and flat dent on a seam, unless the dent is tipped inward.

Dispose of cans with dents that cause sharp corners or sharp creases. If a fingernail applied to the edge of the crease can suspend the can, discard it.

Dispose of cans with dents in the pull-top can lid except in tried food cans when there is no leakage.

Discard cans with side dents causing points at the ends of the crease and cans that when the crease is so deep it also deforms an end of the can, causing it to wobble. Also dispose of severely crushed cans with the sides folded in on itself.

Dispose of swollen cans. You can detect a slight amount of swelling by pressing on the end. If the end can be pushed in, contamination is present. Discard even if the end springs back after it is released.

Rust
Rust that remains after wiping may indicate rust pitting that is deep enough to allow contamination. Discard the can.
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GLASS & PLASTIC

What to look for in a “good” jar

Check for a vacuum that makes the jar airtight. An inward dished lid (usually marked with a printed pop-up indicator) shows the jar has a vacuum and is airtight.

If a container is not vacuum-sealed, a screw-cap and seal protect the contents from tampering and physical contamination. Discard the item if there is visual evidence of contamination or if the seal is broken.

Discard jars with a raised center that may or may not spring back after being depressed. Not: An item may have both a pop-up seal indicator and a tamper-proof band. If the band is broken and the pop-up seal is intact, the item is acceptable.

Discard glass jars with dents on the lids. This indicates that glass chips may be in the food.
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Hidden Packaging Issues
What to look for that may not be evident at first look

Certain containers have an inner safety seal. Jars with this type of seal must have the inner seal checked for a securely intact seal. Open the screw lid and gently tap the inner seal to ensure that it is completely intact. If the seal is intact, replace the screw lid.

Food boxes that are opened must have the inner bag removed and checked for a tear in the bag. If the inner bag is intact, it can be replaced into the box and the box taped closed.

Food boxes that are sealed closed but the outer box has a tear, the box must be open and the inner bag removed to check that the bag is intact. If the bag is not compromised, it can be reinserted into the box and the box taped closed.

Bags of dried foods (beans, rice, etc.) must be checked for holes in the bag.
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LABELS

What to look for in a label

The U.S. Fair Packaging and Labeling Act prohibits the distribution of any food item (except fresh fruit and vegetables) without a label. Labels shall contain:

- Common name of the product, for example, apple sauce
- Name and address of manufacturer, packer or distributor
- Quantity of the contents, for example, 10 oz.
- Common name of each ingredient, for example, salt or sugar

**Products with torn labels are acceptable when all the above information is legible and complete.

**If ingredients are missing as shown below, you must dispose of the product.

Many people are on restricted or specialized diets while other may be allergic to individual foods. The ingredients list helps them avoid products which may cause allergic reactions or are life threatening.
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EVALUATING
DATES
The Food Safety and HACCP Committee (FSHC) of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County developed the above

INTERPRETING LABEL DATES
Shelf Stable Products
Guide for Community Partners, Program Sites
and the individuals they serve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Safe to keep past stamped date¹:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cans, Bottles &amp; Plastic Boxes, low acidity</td>
<td>4 years²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cans &amp; Bottles, high acidity (includes tomatoes, fruit, 100% juice)</td>
<td>21 months³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cans &amp; Bottles, Miscellaneous (milk, frost, sauces)</td>
<td>15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut Butter</td>
<td>15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Goods-Boxed or Bagged, (pasta, beans, white rice, spices, &amp; coffee)</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Goods-Boxed or Bagged, Baking (cake mixes, flour, baking soda)</td>
<td>15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Goods-Boxed or Bagged, Miscellaneous (brown rice, cereal)</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookies, Chips, Popcorn</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>18 months⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condiments (including mayo, oils)</td>
<td>18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverages (soda, carbonated items, soy and rice milk)</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Food Items (Health &amp; Beauty)</td>
<td>No Expiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over the Counter Medication/Vitamins (Ingested)</td>
<td>Throw Away⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Food Products &amp; Formula</td>
<td>Throw Away⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic Beverages</td>
<td>Throw Away</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Stamped Date includes:
- “Sell By” dates
- “Best if Used By” dates
- “Use By” dates

² Cans are safe indefinitely. USDA recommends these guidelines for food quality. Food quality is being defined as palatable and reasonably nutritious for its food category.

³ High-acid canned foods (tomatoes, fruits) will keep their best quality for 12 to 18 months.

⁴ It’s not the water, it’s the packaging. After 18 months the packaging begins to compromise the safety and quality of the water.

⁵ Over the counter medications are medications that are available without a doctor’s prescription. Personal care items are not included.

⁶ Feeding America Requirement (Check Long List for toddler food)