Food Safety Program  
Date Marking Fact Sheet

**Public Health Significance**  
Bacteria can grow to dangerous levels when some foods are stored under refrigeration for extended periods. This can lead to an increased risk of foodborne illness. As a result, refrigerated potentially hazardous and ready-to-eat foods must be date marked to assure the food is either consumed or discarded within 7 days.

**Definitions**  
Potentially hazardous: time/temperature controlled for safety foods.  
Ready-to-eat: food that does not require any additional preparation, such as washing or cooking.

**Date marking is only required when food is:**  
- Potentially hazardous;  
- Ready-to-eat;  
- Refrigerated (41°F or below); and stored more than 24 hours.

**How do I date mark required food items?**  
The date marking requirements listed above apply to processed food from a manufacturer, such as deli meats, once they have been opened, as well as to food prepared in a licensed facility. The date marking requirements specify that containers be date marked with a “consume by” date (date of opening/preparation + 6 days) and if food is not consumed by that date – it must be discarded.

Ex: A food opened/prepared on April 2nd would need to be marked with a “consume by” date of April 8th (date of opening/preparation + 6 days).

This can be done by simply writing the “consume by” date on the food container or covering with a marker.

When combining foods in a dish with different “consume by” dates, the “consume by” date of the new dish should be the date of the earliest opened/prepared food.

**What if I freeze the food?**  
Freezing food stops the date marking clock but does not reset it. If a food is refrigerated for 2 days and then frozen, it can still be refrigerated for 5 more days when it begins to thaw.

**Date Marking Exemptions**  
1. Salad dressings and condiments packaged by the manufacturer: such as ketchup, mustard, relish, mayonnaise, and salad dressings. Salad dressings/sauces prepared in the food facility must be date marked.
2. Deli salads packaged by the manufacturer: such as ham salad, seafood salad, chicken salad, egg salad, pasta salad, and macaroni salad. Deli salads prepared in the food facility must be date marked.
3. Cultured dairy products: such as milk, creams, sour cream, and yogurt.
4. Hard cheeses: such as cheddar, gruyere, parmesan, reggiano, and romano.
5. Semi-soft cheeses: such as blue, edam, gorgonzola, gouda, and monteray jack.
6. Uncut portions of shelf stable processed cured meats that are not labeled “Keep Refrigerated.”

**Contact Us**  
We will be happy to answer any questions you have about date marking in your facility! Please call our Food Safety Program at 740-349-6535 or email us at environmental@lickingcohealth.org

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