



Georgia Department of Agriculture

Gary W. Black, Commissioner

(404) 656-3645

19 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, SW

Atlanta, Georgia 30334-4201

Expiration Dates & Food Safety

In the State of Georgia, there are several food product areas that Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) Food Safety Division Inspectors are required by law to examine during a routine inspection. It is considered unlawful to sell or offer for sale, at retail or wholesale, the following food items past the expiration date stated on the label:

- ✓ Milk;
- ✓ Eggs;
- ✓ Pre-packed sandwiches and other ready-to-eat products;
- ✓ Infant formula;
- ✓ Fresh shellfish (including oysters, clams and mussels); and
- ✓ Any potentially hazardous foods* that are labeled “Keep Refrigerated”
*(*Hazardous foods relate to foods with time and temperature controls for the safety of the product.)*

Need answers to food safety questions?

In Georgia, call: (404) 656-3627

To reach the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, call the Consumer Hotline at 1-888-463-6332. For questions concerning meat & poultry, contact the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 1-888-647-6854 or Mphotline.fsis@usda.gov

The term “Expiration Date” is synonymous with the following terms: Pull Date, Best-By Date, Best Before Date, Use-By Date and Sell-By Date; and pertains to the last date the food products can be sold through retail or wholesale distribution. During a retail inspection, inspectors look at these referenced products to ensure none have gone past their date of expiration. Outside this list of prescribed food items, nearly all food products on retail shelves include an expiration date on the product packaging. Consumers are encouraged to check expiration dates before making a purchase and to notify a store manager if an expired product is found on store shelves.

It is important to remember that for products outside the list above – especially dry, shelf-stable products (potato chips or rice, for example) – the expiration date is considered a “guideline” for freshness and quality. If a food product has reached its expiration date, it will most likely be an issue of food quality, not food safety, and does not necessarily need to be disposed of immediately. If the product has been stored properly and appears to be visually wholesome and fit for consumption, it can still be consumed after the expiration date with little to no threat of food safety concerns. But remember the old adage, “When in doubt, throw it out!”

For additional information, or to report a complaint pertaining to food products purchased from retail or wholesale facilities in Georgia, please contact the GDA Consumer Complaint line at 404-656-3627. Find real-time updates about food safety, food recalls and other agriculture news and tips by following @GDAFoodSafety on Twitter at www.twitter.com/gdafoodsafety. Have more questions? Consumers can “Ask Karen,” virtual representative for USDA Food Safety Inspection Service, and get answers online at www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Ask_Karen.