

## Fact Sheet: Date Marking

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The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide a summary of the Date Marking criteria that will take effect beginning July 1, 2015. Please refer to the [2009 FDA Food Code Chapter 3-501.17](#) for complete Date Marking information.

### Why is Date Marking Important?

Date marking is a means of controlling the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes*.

- *Listeria monocytogenes* is a bacterium that continues to grow at refrigerator temperatures.
- Date marking is a procedure to ensure food is discarded before these bacteria can cause foodborne illness.

### What FOODS must be Date Marked?

Other than the foods exempt from Date Marking (on the left), all Ready-to-Eat, Time/Temperature Control Foods (TCS foods) that are held under refrigeration for more than 24 hours must be date marked.

#### Exemptions from Date Marking Requirements:

1. Individual meal portions served or repackaged from a bulk container upon a consumer's request.
2. Shellstock
3. Any of the following foods if prepared and packaged by an inspected food processing plant:
  - Deli salads
  - Aged hard cheese
  - Semi-soft cheeses
  - Cultured dairy products
  - Preserved Fish products
  - Shelf stable dry

#### ❖ Ready to Eat, Time Temperature for Safety (TCS) foods, including both:

- Commercially prepared and/or
- Prepared onsite and held under refrigeration for more than 24 hours.

### How to Date Mark your establishment's food items?

Any system of date marking is acceptable, provided it is:

- Understandable
- Effective
- Consistent

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### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

#### What if I **FREEZE** the food?

- Freezing food stops the date marking clock but does not reset it.
- If a food is stored at 41° F for two days and then frozen at 0° F, it can be safely stored at 41° F for five more days after removal from the freezer.
- The **freezing date and the thawing date** must be provided on the container along with the preparation date to indicate how many of the original seven days have expired.

**If food is not properly dated, it must be used or discarded within 24 hours.**

#### What if I **COMBINE** foods that were opened on **DIFFERENT DATES**?

It is best to **AVOID** mixing different batches of foods.

If different containers of foods are combined, *the date of the **oldest** ingredient becomes the reference date.*

For example:

If today is Wednesday, and you are mixing salad prepared on Monday with salad prepared on Tuesday, the salad would be labeled as prepared Monday.

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### Date Marking of Potentially Hazardous, Ready-to-Eat Foods

