Let’s Dive into Date Marking

Date-marking foods can be a confusing topic; let’s talk about how to properly date mark food and what foods need to be dated. All different types of food come into your facility including raw vegetables, commercially prepared dressings and sauces, custom meats, and more. The general rule is that if food is prepared further in your kitchen that item would need to be date marked, held hot or cold, and discarded within 7 days.

Foods that we see as inspectors that are used longer than accepted include dressings and sauces. Even when you are combining ingredients that alone are stable for longer than 7 days we must assume they are potentially hazardous. If there is a product that you make in your facility you believe is safe for longer than 7 days you must submit a food study to show that the chemistry of the food preserves it for longer than 7 days, or change operations to make smaller batches so everything is used within 7 days.

The recommendation would be all foods that are prepared in your facility that will be held for 24 hours or longer be date marked, held under temperature control and used within 7 days.

Another aspect of date marking is how to count the 7 days. Remember the date of production is day 1, meaning that if you make a product on Wednesday the 5th you can use it until Tuesday the 11th and any leftover product must be discarded on the 8th day. A common mistake is to add 7 days to the date when it was made and use the product for 8 days.

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Commercially prepared products are also used commonly in the kitchen. These products are made in a food plant that has undergone testing to verify that the food item can be used until the date of expiration. Examples of commercial products including dressings, potato and pasta salads, sauces, and more. If these products are used as an ingredient in a new dish or have ingredients added to them then they require the date-marking instructions explained above. For example: if you open a container of ranch dressing on Wednesday the 5th follow the manufactured date on the container for when to discard the product. On the other hand, if you opened a container of ranch dressing and added other ingredients, follow the date marking instructions above.

While date marking can occasionally be confusing, we hope to clear the air for what foods must be marked and how long they can be used for. If you have any further questions please contact us and ask for clarification.

Wisconsin Food Code sections referenced: ATCP 75: 3-501.17 and 3-501.18