Understanding Container Dates

"USE BY", "BEST IF USED BY", or "QUALITY ASSURANCE" DATE: The last date the product is likely to be at top flavor and quality. You will probably find these dates on foods such as cereal, which may lose flavor and quality. **It doesn't mean the food is unsafe after that date.**

"SELL BY" or "PULL" DATE: This date is for food stores. It shows the last day on which the item should be sold. It takes into account time for the food to be stored and used at home. You should buy the item before the date, but you don't have to use it by then. Fresh milk, for example, usually keeps its taste for up to 7 days past the sell-by date.

PACK OR PACKAGE DATE: This is the date the food was packed and processed. You can tell which package is fresher and choose that one. **A pack date isn't an indication of safety**.

"EXPIRATION" DATE: For most foods, this indicates the last date on which they should be eaten or used. Eggs are an exception: if you buy federally graded eggs before the expiration date, you should be able to use them safely for the next 3-5 weeks. (The Food Bank receives extensions on expiration dates for cheeses and other dairy products- the extension is usually one month).

CODED DATE: A series of letters or numbers or both used by the manufacturer to track foods across state lines and, if necessary, recall them. **The code is useful to you when there is a food recall.**

Remember:

- Throw away damaged foods and store foods at the right temperatures.
- If foods are packaged and frozen properly, they will be safe to eat after the expiration date.
- Give out your frozen foods within 2 months of receiving them.