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## **An Expiration to Food Date Confusion**

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**SACRAMENTO** - In a move expected to dramatically reduce food waste, Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin introduced legislation on Thursday to require packaged food sold in California be labeled with clear and consistent expiration dates. Assembly Bill (AB) 660 will assist consumers in understanding how long they can safely keep and consume products before discarding them.

AB 660 builds on a 2017 law that established voluntary labeling standards, by requiring expiration date labels by January 1, 2025 to use the phrases “BEST if used by” to indicate peak freshness and “USE by” to indicate food safety. The bill prohibits the use of consumer visible “Sell-By” dates.

Studies have shown that consumers often throw away food before it has spoiled, and vague phrasing about expiration dates used on labels can be confusing. This consumer uncertainty is estimated by the Food and Drug Administration to cause about 20 percent of food waste. Making the current voluntary standards mandatory will reduce waste, save consumers money, and fight climate change by cutting the amount of food sent to landfills, where it produces methane gas as it decomposes. Methane is over 80 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

“Having to wonder whether our food is still good is an issue that we all have struggled with. By strengthening labeling standards and reducing food waste, AB 660 will keep money in the pockets of consumers while helping the environment and the planet,” said Assemblymember Irwin.

The bill is sponsored by Californians Against Waste (CAW), a nonprofit group that has led the fight to help consumers reduce waste and hold producers responsible for the harm their products do to the environment.

“About a third of the food supply is wasted every year – 6 million tons in California alone – while Californians are struggling with the increased cost of food,” said Gracyna Mohabir, Policy Associate at CAW. “This bill will benefit consumers while addressing the staggering impacts food waste has on climate change.”

ReFED, a national nonprofit focused on ending food loss and waste in the U.S. is also applauding the introduction of the bill.

“Most consumers don't realize that date labels generally refer to a product's estimated quality, not whether it's safe to consume, which leads them to prematurely throw away lots of perfectly edible food,” said Dana Gunders, Executive Director of ReFED. “Having a standardized set of date labels – one focused on quality and one focused on safety – and clearly communicating to consumers what each one means has the potential to save more than half a million tons of food from going to waste each year nationally.”

AB 954, passed in 2017 by former Assemblymember David Chiu, promoted the voluntary use of the phrases “BEST if used by” to indicate peak freshness and “USE by” to indicate food safety. The law also discouraged the use of “Sell by” date labels visible to consumers because these dates are meant only for stock rotation but are often mistaken as an indication of food safety.

Four years after that bill took effect, many food companies continue to use phrases such as “expires on” and “enjoy by,” which can do more to confuse consumers than empower them.

*Assemblymember Irwin's website: <https://a42.asmdc.org>*

*Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin represents California's 42nd Assembly District, which includes portions of both Ventura and Los Angeles Counties; including all of Agoura Hills, Bel Air, Beverly Glen, Brentwood, Casa Conejo, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Lake Sherwood, Malibu, Moorpark, Oak Park, Pacific Palisades, Santa Susana, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Topanga, Westlake Village, and portions of Camarillo.*

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