



Date Marking: What You Should Know

1. What is Date Marking and why is it important?

Date marking is a means to control the growth of Listeria, a bacteria that grows at refrigeration temperatures. Date marking is a system that identifies how old foods are and when those foods should be discarded before bacteria can cause foodborne illness.

2. What foods must be Date Marked?

Foods that are:

- ready to eat, or that *could* be eaten regardless of temperature, and
- Time/Temperature Control for Safety requiring refrigeration, and
- prepared and held in the establishment for more than 24 hours.



3. Do commercially packaged foods with a use by date placed by the manufacturer have to be Date Marked?

No. In Alabama the date limit placed by the manufacturer is sufficient.

4. What date or mark should be placed on the food?

- The date placed on the food may reflect the last day the food can be consumed, sold, or discarded **or** the first day the food was prepared.
- The day of preparation counts as day 1.
- Whatever system is used must be understandable, effective, and clear to both employees and the inspector.
- Foods that are date marked and held under refrigeration must be consumed, sold, or discarded within 7 days.

5. What if I freeze the food?

Freezing food “stops” the date marking clock but does not reset it.

6. What if I combine food that was opened or prepared on different days?

When foods are mixed together, the date of the **oldest** food becomes the reference date for Date Marking.

