

Q&A Date Labelling Coalition

Numbers of wasted food due to expiry dates by consumers

1. How much food is wasted (across the chain) related to shelf life?

- a) Annual EU-28 food waste attributable to date marking issues was estimated at between 6.9 Mt/yr and 8.9 Mt/yr across the manufacturing/ processing, retail and household sectors. This represents 5%, 55% and 9.5-12% of the food waste from those three sectors, respectively.
- b) The value of 8.9 Mt/yr for food waste attributable to date marking issues approximates to 10% of the estimate for total food waste in the EU-28 (88 Mt/yr). (source: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e7be006f-0d55-11e8-966a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>)

2. How much food is wasted (specifically among consumers) related to shelf life?

- a) EU research shows: 9.5-12% of the food waste in households is attributable to date marking issues. In research by the Voedingscentrum from 2022, a validated questionnaire was used to map the amount of food waste in Dutch households. That questionnaire asks for each product group whether you wasted it and why. 13% of times, 'the use-by date had expired' was chosen. This was the average for all product groups. (source: [self-reported food waste Flycatcher 2022 incl. regression analysis and animals outside.pdf \(voedingscentrum.nl\)](#))

3. What is the level of knowledge in the Netherlands?

There is still a large group in the Netherlands that does not know about expiry dates:

- a) 68% say they know the difference between Best before (BB) and Use by (UB) dates, of which 67% can actually explain it correctly. So some 46% of Dutch people actually know the differences.
- b) You can also see that BB and UB dates were often treated as the same or vice versa. (source: [self-reported food waste Flycatcher 2022 incl. regression analysis and animals outside.pdf \(voedingscentrum.nl\)](#))

4. What environmental benefit does clarifying shelf life on packaging bring?

- a. For each product group, the Voedingscentrum has estimated the potential impact to be gained if a product is no longer discarded due to expiry of the best-before date. This is about the impact in kg of product and greenhouse gas emissions involved.

	% waste due to shelf life per kg of product sold	Greenhouse gas emissions per kg of product sold from wastage due to shelf life (kg CO2-eq)
Meat & meat products	2,1%	0,29
Fish	0,7%	0,05
Cheese	0,8%	0,08
Dairy	1,9%	0,04
Eggs	4,2%	0,18
Vegetable	0,3%	0,01
Fruit	0,3%	0,00
Potatoes	0,4%	0,00
Bread	0,7%	0,01
Cake	1,4%	0,04
Meal residues	0,1%	0,00
Rice	0,8%	0,01
Pasta	0,6%	0,01
Candy & snacks	0,6%	0,02
Sandwich filling	2,4%	0,06
Sauce & fats	2,8%	0,10
Soepen	1,1%	0,03

These figures were calculated based on the following data:

- Report Food waste at consumers' homes in the Netherlands, 2022 by the Voedingscentrum
<https://www.voedingscentrum.nl/Assets/Uploads/voedingscentrum/Documents/Professionals/Pers/Pers%20overig/Rapport%20Voedselverspilling%202022.pdf>.
- Annex Food waste at consumers' homes in the Netherlands, 2022 by the Voedingscentrum

- Disclaimer: Please note: These figures give a rough indication of the potential impact of food waste caused by expired expiry dates. The estimated percentage of food waste due to expired expiry dates is based on self-reporting. Self-reporting does not distinguish between wastage of products with a BB and UB date, which may overestimate the impact of icons on food wastage. Alternatively, underestimation may occur because self-reporting participants may have indicated a different reason for wasting while expired best-before date may have been an underlying cause (e.g. 'the product could no longer be trusted' or 'the product was no longer tasty'). No rights can be derived from these data.*

5. Are these additional icons and texts actually effective?

- a. Research by WUR in 2021 shows that it pays to invest in clear shelf-life information on packaging. A small group has their behavior positively influenced by it. (source: [Shelf life icons on packaging can reduce food waste - WUR](#) and [The influence of date marking related visual cues on consumers' interpretation and choices to discard or use food : two consumer studies in The Netherlands](#))
- b. Research in real-life setting by WUR in 2023 emphasized that shelf life icons on packaging actually help consumers to better deal with food management. Added icons on packaging led, as desired, to different waste behavior for products with best before and use by dates. (source: [On-pack information about expiry dates can change food waste behaviours in households - WUR](#))
- c. Wider implementation could better investigate the effect of the additional information.

6. What is the Dutch government's position on deployment of these icons?

The Dutch government has a positive attitude towards this:

- a. The NVWA will not enforce the use of the icons accepted by VWS (ministry of public health welfare and sport) to combat food waste, provided these icons are used correctly.
- b. VWS encourages the use of the icons and texts complementing the BB and UB dates on food packaging in order to prevent food waste without compromising food safety.
- c. The ministries of VWS, LNV, WUR, Too Good To Go, Voedingscentrum and Samen Tegen Voedselverspilling (Food Waste Free United) were involved in the creation of the developed icons and texts.

7. Does the use of these icons/texts replace explanations for 'perishable after opening'?

- a. No, this is a voluntary addition to clarify BB and UB dates.
- b. It is mandatory to clarify 'perishable', see conditions here: [Shelf life date on food products | Food labelling | NVWA](#)

Placing icons on products

8. Can the voluntary icons and texts be used on all products?

- a. The additional information for BB dates can be placed on all BB products. Provided that the use of the BB date on the product concerned is correct, see: [Shelf life date on food products | Food labelling | NVWA](#) (in Dutch)
- b. For products where food safety risks could occur after opening, the use of 'look, smell and taste' is undesirable. The storage advice should be clarified in terms of the number of days (instead of perishable) and storage conditions (temperature).
- c. The additional information for BB can be placed on all BB products.

9. Within what time frame should this information be placed on packaging?

- a. Within 3 years of signing the coalition conditions agreement.

10. Suppose a party can only adjust its packaging in 3 years, is there any communication throughout the period up to that point about that party being part of the coalition? Or do you get attention only after you have adjusted it?

- a. If you clarify shelf life to consumers in other ways within those 3 years, for example with campaigns and communications, then you can certainly be a partner in the coalition from the start.

11. How long should this information remain on packaging?

- a. Preferably forever, definitively.

12. Are there minimum and maximum dimensions for these icons on packaging?

- a. At least the same font size as labelling and the image should still be recognizable.

13. Do any producers already have experience with placing these icons?

Too Good To Go's Look-Smell-Taste label (for BB products) is already used by more than 500 brands in 14 countries. And is findable on more than 7 billion products every year. Examples of products with the icons that are on the shelves in the Netherlands are: Albert Heijn house brand yoghurt and milk in a carton, Unox soup in a bag, Knorr world dishes and Bertolli and Jean Baton sauces.

14. I produce products that go to different countries, and for this reason I have several languages on the packaging. Is this logo also there in English, or other languages? Or can it be translated into other languages?

- a. Yes, the texts are available from Samen Tegen Voedselverspilling (Food Waste Free United) in NL, ENG, DE, FR and ES. You can find those here: <https://samentegenvoedselverspilling.nl/media/pages/medialibrary/cafdc4be3f-1717058142/vertalingen-houdbaarheidsiconen.pdf>
- b. Too Good To Go's Look-Smell-Taste label is currently available in 10 languages, is also available bi- and tri-lingual and in multiple colours and sizes. See: [Too Good To Go Brand Portal](#)
- c. NB: the information should not be confusing so different languages should not be used in 1 sentence

15. How does the EU view the use of these icons? And can these icons also be used in other countries?

- a. There are no specific guidelines from the EU on whether or not to use voluntary additional information on the BB dates.

16. How is this initiative related to all that is currently going on about sustainability claims, certifications and Nutriscore which may/should/could also appear on our packaging?

- a. There is no connection to this. Shelf life indications and icons are separate from claims, certifications and food choice logos.

Date Labelling Coalition

17. Why is it interesting to participate in this coalition?

- a. Big societal and climate impact for relatively small effort;
- b. Good for the organization's image. You show that you are committed to reducing food waste, in a well-argued way;
- c. You make a positive chain contribution to reducing CO2 (scope 3), which is also part of CSRD reporting.

18. Where can I go for more information?

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