

Topical Documentation Service:

The topical documentation service **SAVE FOOD – Figure of the Month** provides regular information on the latest data and findings in matters of food loss and food waste. Each issue highlights a selected focal area. This service is provided by the SAVE FOOD initiative.

SAVE FOOD – Figure of the Month: March

4,909 pallets of food and beverages are distributed by more than **900 food banks in Germany each year**, reaching needy people throughout the country – over one and a half million by now. This is the equivalent of about 150 truck loads. Most of these food items are products which **are about to reach their best-before date.**¹

Almost no other information is misunderstood as often as this date. Most consumers believe that it tells them whether a food product is still edible. However, the best-before date is simply the date until when a product retains its original qualities under proper storage. It means that, until that date, the product will have the same colour, consistency and maximum effectiveness of its active ingredients as it did immediately upon production. However, the best-before date tells us nothing about the period of time when the product is safe to consume. And, in fact, in most cases it does indeed continue to be safe. So the best-before date is by no means an expiry date or a use-by date.²

The best-before date is a legal requirement, but is decided from case to case by each manufacturer and can therefore vary for the same kind of product and can “expire” either earlier or later. Ultimately, each consumer needs to decide for themselves how long yoghurt and similar products are safe to consume. But there are a few rules of thumb. Sliced cheese, for instance, will keep for another two weeks after the best-before date, and hard cheese will even keep for over a year. Fresh milk will survive in the fridge for another week, and UHT milk for several weeks. Cold meat – kept within the package – continues to be perfectly edible for another two or three days after the best-before date. One item that will keep for an amazingly long time is jam, which continues to be edible for several years after the best-before date.³

It's certainly worthwhile having a good look and letting our senses decide. In this way we can make a major contribution to avoiding food loss, as about a third of all manufactured food is either lost or wasted throughout the world.⁴ An even better level of certainty can be achieved through intelligent packaging systems as a good practical alternative to the use-by date. Smart packaging solutions – e.g. time/temperature indicators – tell us about the freshness of a product throughout its lifetime, signalling to the consumer whether there have been interruptions in the refrigeration chain. Another example is the use of packaging film which changes colour in response to metabolites, so that it becomes quite obvious when a packaged product ceases to be edible.

The entire issue of food losses and waste will be on the agenda of the Second International SAVE FOOD Convention in Düsseldorf from 7 to 8 May. As a leading international trade fair for the packaging industry and

Initiative SAVE FOOD

Messe Düsseldorf GmbH
Postfach 10 10 06
40001 Düsseldorf
Germany
Tel. +49(0)211/45 60 - 01
Fax +49(0)211/45 60 - 6 68

www.save-food.org

An initiative of Messe Düsseldorf
in collaboration with the
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of the United Nations (FAO).





the related processing industry, *interpack* is an ideal platform for bringing together industry experts from companies and associations with representatives of government and the community.

1) <http://www.tafel.de/der-bundesverband/publikationeninfomaterial/jahresbericht.html>

2) <http://www.vz-nrw.de/UNIQ133051703204826/link13351A.html#Mindest>

3)

<http://www.vzhh.de/ernaehrung/159144/Tipps%20zur%20Haltbarkeit%20von%20Lebensmitteln.pdf>

4) FAO Global Losses and Food Waste

About SAVE FOOD:

SAVE FOOD is a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and Messe Düsseldorf GmbH against worldwide food loss and waste. Since the beginning of 2013 the initiative has also been supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). SAVE FOOD seeks to network between the relevant players in business, government and research, encourage dialogue and help to find solutions along the food value chain. Another aim is to initiate and promote special SAVE FOOD projects with support from industry. SAVE FOOD was launched in Düsseldorf in May 2011 with an international convention and an exhibition as part of *interpack*, the world's leading trade fair in the packaging industry and the related processing industry. As before, experts from business, government and public life will be meeting at *interpack* 2014 on the 7 and 8 May to discuss the issue of food loss and waste. Further details can be found at www.save-food.org.

Contact

SAVE FOOD Press Office

Jan Leder
PR and Media Relations
Grayling Deutschland GmbH
Rather Str. 49 D
D – 40476 Düsseldorf
Tel.: +49 (0)211 – 964 85-41
Fax: +49 (0)211 – 964 85-45
JL@save-food.org

Press Department for interpack 2014

Sebastian Pflügge
Cathrin Imkampe (Assistant)
Messe Düsseldorf GmbH
Messeplatz
40474 Düsseldorf
Tel.: +49 (0) 211/4560-464/-589
Fax: +49 (0) 211/4560-8548
Email: PflueggeS@messe-duesseldorf.de,
ImkampeC@messe-duesseldorf.de