

FOOD 'USE BY' DATES
(Paper by Eva Lewis, Consumer Panel Member October 1995)

Introduction

An article in the Observer stated that shoppers are buying dangerous food as a result of a widespread trade in second hand produce. The Observer has discovered that 'best before' and 'use by' dates are routinely changed by dealers. Their findings caused many inquiries by manufacturers and supermarkets dismayed to find their old products end up on the shelves of thousands of corner shops instead of being destroyed. The Observer discovered that trading standards officers in South Glamorgan have been examining a case in which Sainsbury's own-brand chicken kiev was being sold with a new label. One Observer reporter had been offered Uncle Ben's mustard that had been sent to Russia and back and after being tested at Voeicker laboratories was found to have higher than expected levels of mould and gateau faecal streptococci, a bacteria caused by human faeces.

Concerns

Many manufacturers permit dealers to extend 'use by' and 'best before' dates as a result of a change in the law 4 years ago. According to the article 'when this permission is not available, dealers are selling out of date food to customers including relabelling, physically altering dates or rubbing them off altogether.

- Could the Panel be informed as to exactly what this legal 'loophole' is?
- How much does this contribute to the rise in food poisoning?

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