**FOOD PRODUCT DATING**

**Resource:**

Georgia Rules and Regulations for Food Service – Chapter 511-6-1 Rule-.04 (8) (b):

**Expired Foods.** Prepackaged sandwiches, eggs, infant formula, shucked oysters, milk, and time/temperature control safety foods that are labeled as “keep refrigerated” and that are for sale or service to the consumer or used as an ingredient in other foods shall be immediately discarded and shall not be sold, served, or used after the manufacturer’s expiration date or the sell-by date.

**Explanation:**

The Georgia Food Code Rule considers expiration dates, sell-by dates, use-by dates and best-if-used-by dates the same. It is a critical violation (9 points) if prepackaged sandwiches, eggs, milk, or time/temperature control safety foods that are labeled “keep refrigerated” are found beyond the date indicated on the package.

The Rule does not reference “pack date” nor does the USDA have any requirements regarding “pack date.” A "pack date" simply indicates when the product was packaged or processed. Thus, while “pack date” may help to determine the age of the product, it does not necessarily provide useful information on its wholesomeness or nutritional value. Yet, for safety and quality, consider the following recommendations when storing products that have only a “pack date”:

Frozen foods – Maintain hard frozen, ≤ 10ºF, for up to 18 months beyond the “pack date.”

Refrigerated foods – Maintain internal temperature of food at ≤ 41ºF. Fresh raw meats and poultry should not be kept longer than 3 days. Fully cooked meats and poultry can be stored for up to 7 days. (Note: The Georgia Food Code Rule will allow any refrigerated time/temperature control safety foods to be stored for up to 7 days after opening. However, this is not advisable for fresh raw meats and poultry.)

Canned foods – Maintain in dry storage, ≤ 70ºF, for up to 24 months beyond the “pack date.”

Packaged foods – Maintain in dry storage, ≤ 70ºF, for up to 18 months beyond the “pack date” (except for grain products).

Packaged grain products (flour, corn meal, grits, etc.) – Maintain in dry storage, ≤ 70ºF, for up to 12 months beyond the “pack date.” If these products are still in storage at the end of the school year and there is at least 3 months left before having to use or discard the product, place the product in plastic bags and store in the walk-in cooler over the summer break.

Note: weevil eggs are in many grain products. This is unavoidable. Keeping the product cool will help prevent the eggs from hatching and allowing weevils to contaminate the product. While weevils are not known to cause illness, they are considered an adulterant. Thus, if weevils are found in a grain product, discard the product immediately.

**Inventorying and Ordering:**

Use “First In – First Out” (FIFO) with all food products. Always place new product behind older product to consistently rotate foods.

Check menu items often.

* Maintain records of how much of each food product is used daily. These records are essential to knowing how much to order annually. Do not order more than what you are reasonably sure you can use within 12 months or during one school year.
* Consider foods that must be kept on hand for emergencies and field trips. Order extra quantities of these to comfortably satisfy what is needed for the estimated number of field trips and for an emergency that may last up to one week. If a school is a designated shelter, try to stock foods that can be prepared without cooking. Also, consider how these foods can be used should there not be an emergency, i.e. the foods must still be used prior to the “expiration date” or discarded.

If USDA foods are stored that are within 3 months of expiration and it is determined that the school or school system will not be able to use them, the following is recommended: Call the Food Distribution Unit in the Georgia Department of Education, School Nutrition Office. Another school system may be able to use the food product.