**Best Before dates shouldn’t be a barrier to redistribution**

* New guidance urges more businesses, redistribution organisations and charities to look beyond the Best Before date.
* No food surplus should go to waste, and redistribution should include more good quality food beyond the Best Before, says WRAP.
* If stored correctly, food can be eaten days (e.g. bread), weeks (e.g. apples and crisps), months (e.g. biscuits and cereals) or even years (e.g. dried pasta and canned food) after the Best Before date.

New guidance published today by **WRAP**, **Defra** and the **Food Standards Agency** underlines the fact that food past its Best Before date remains safe, and perfectly good to eat for days, weeks, months or even years after the date – depending on the type of food and if it has been stored correctly.

The guidance aims to increase the amount of food made available by businesses for redistribution by ensuring that all food items, either approaching or past the Best Before date, are considered for redistribution – and that current policies that might not allow this are reviewed. The simple to use guide will also give redistribution organisations across the UK the confidence to accept more quality food past the Best Before date; by building on existing guidance on food labelling in ways that can be easily implemented in accordance with UK laws on food safety.

Many businesses and redistribution organisations do include food approaching, or past the Best Before dates, but WRAP believes the practice could be greatly increased, and that much more food could reach those who need it most.

**Peter Maddox, Director WRAP,** *“Food businesses are doing an incredible job ensuring that food which cannot be sold at this time moves around the supply chain to feed people, and isn’t wasted. Our guide will help by giving clear advice on how best to redistribute food that’s exceeded the Best Before date. The law states that all food with a Best Before date can be sold, redistributed and consumed after that date, as long as it’s still good quality, but we appreciate that isn’t understood by all, or universally implemented. So, our aim is to make this common practice.”*

The guide also has the support of the Government’s **Food Surplus and Waste Champion Ben Elliot**, who this month wrote to the UK’s largest food retailers, manufacturers, companies across the hospitality and food service sector and redistributors urging them to relax internal rules that might be preventing food surplus from being made good use of, including food past the Best Before date.

**Government Food Surplus and Waste Champion Ben Elliot** said,*“During this uncertain time it is essential we overcome all barriers to tackling food waste.*

*“This new guidance will equip organisations with the knowledge and confidence needed to ensure tonnes of good quality food is not needlessly thrown away.”*

**Beyond Best Before**

The guide outlines simple information across four key food categories that typically carry a Best Before date; **uncut fresh produce**, **bread and bakery**, **ambient products** packaged in cans, jars, packets; and **frozen foods**. It stresses the importance of visual checks of food and packaging to ensure the food is good quality. An important addition is advice on how long after the Best Before different foods could be expected to be suitable for redistribution, that food business and redistribution organisations can then use as a basis when deciding how to implement the guidance:

* There is no legal requirement for **fresh, uncut fruit and vegetables** to carry any date label. Many products don’t or are sold loose, in accordance with WRAP best practice guidance. There is no exact time for when individual products would be of sufficient quality after their Best Before date. This depends on the food type, its variety and seasonality, and the nature of the individual item. It may range from one additional day for perishable items, to two weeks for more robust crops like swedes. Most fruits and vegetables stay fresh for longer if stored in a fridge, below 5°C, and in their original packaging.
* **Bread and bakery products** remain good to eat for between two days for bread, and up to one week for other packaged bakery products. Some bakery items are sold in long life packaging (e.g. some pitta breads) enabling them to be eaten for a considerably longer period after the Best Before date. This may be a month or longer.
* **Ambient foods** include a range of packaged items which typically carry a Best Before date and a long shelf life. A guide for common items are:
	+ **Crisps** - one month; **biscuits, cereals** – 6 months; **canned meat**, **canned soup**, **confectionery**, **drinks** (cans / plastic / glass bottles) and **pasta sauces** - twelve months; **dried pasta** up to 3 years; **jams** - three to five years.
* **Frozen food** packaging carries an indicative guide for how long the food can be stored frozen with a star rating for optimal quality. The products are usually labelled Best Before End. If items have been stored frozen at the food business operators in accordance with regulations, they will be safe to eat for months after the Best Before End date. The star-rating storage life reflects the length of time the product is likely to remain in good condition; eventually even well-frozen food will deteriorate.

While focussing on the supply chain, WRAP is keen that people at home feel more confident about the meanings of the date labels on their food.

The organisation’s Love Food Hate Waste campaign is promoting information on date labels to clarify the difference between Best Before and Use By, and to ensure people know it’s safe to eat #BeyondBestBefore. The Love Food Hate Waste A–Z storage guide also details the best way to keep any items of food fresh, for longer.

**Peter Maddox**, *“We estimate that over a typical year, around half a billion pounds worth of food is likely to be thrown away from homes linked to a Best Before date, that’s 180,000 tonnes. Knowing the difference between Best Before and Use By is one of the biggest ways to stop food waste in the home. A Best Before date is only a quality guide, and you can use your judgement as to whether it’s still good to eat. Use By is the safety mark and there to protect us. No food should be sold, redistributed or eaten after the Use By.”*

**Supporting quotes**

**Karen Todd, Senior Manager zero waste, ASDA** *“At Asda we believe that no good food should go to waste which is why we have already developed our own process called best before plus 4. We have agreed with our suppliers additional guaranteed life past the printed best before which ranges from best before +4 days , +4 weeks or +4 months. This has resulted in an additional 51 tonnes of food, the equivalent of 120,000 meals being redistributed to our charity partners which otherwise would have not been consumed. We will continue to look at new ways to reduce food waste and we welcome clear guidelines from Wrap for food with a best before date.”*

**Jamie Crummie, co-founder, Too Good To Go UK** *“Date labelling has, and continues to be, a confusing issue for both businesses and consumers. This uncertainty could lead to food waste on a large scale across society. For example, last year we found that 720 million eggs are wasted by Brits each year because of confusions around ‘Best Before’ date labelling. ‘Best Before’ is simply a measure of quality rather than safety and we welcome the latest guidance from WRAP for food business and redistribution organisations on the issue.”*

**Mark Game, CEO, The Bread and Butter Thing, said** *"The Covid-19 pandemic has presented people with the opportunity to reassess their relationship with food. It means we think twice before we throw away edible food and will increasingly shift perceptions around concepts such as Best Before dates. TBBT has always worked in this way - redistributing surplus produce including those recently beyond their Best Before. We discussed this with our members and almost without exception, they are comfortable eating food beyond the Best Before, welcoming the additional variety in their weekly bags."*

**Richard Humphrey, Senior Coordinator His Church**, said *“His Church has been redistributing food, including food past its best before date, for more than fifteen years. As an integral part of our redistributions, this type of food has fed thousands of people, through hundreds of charities, including foodbanks, homeless outreaches, community kitchens, domestic abuse refuges and holiday hunger projects. Sadly, not all our partners currently accept food past its best before date, therefore, education is an ongoing need, especially about the difference between “Use By” and “Best Before” dates. We are fully committed to ensuring all good quality, safe and nutritious surplus food is made available for human consumption, and as such, we wholeheartedly welcome this guidance.”*

**Jonathan Straight, Brand Ambassador from Approved Food** said, *“Since Approved Food began in 2009, we’ve offered a selection of products close to or past their best before date. Dependent on the product and its packaging, this food can be perfectly good for weeks, months or even years beyond the date. We seek to educate our customers about the important difference between Best Before and Use By, and make it clear that this food is in no way inferior. We welcome this guidance from WRAP in highlighting that point.”*

**Notes to editors**

* **Summary Guidance on Redistributing Products with a Best Before Date**is part of a suite of resources produced by WRAP, Defra and the FSA to help food businesses understand and use food labelling in compliance with food regulations, and to ensure that less food goes to waste in the home. It was developed through the Courtauld 2025 Redistribution Working Group and is not legally binding.
* The guide complements WRAP and Defra’s work to strengthen surplus food redistribution, including the COVID-19 Emergency Surplus Food Grant.
* **WRAP** is a not for profit organisation founded in 2000 which works with governments, businesses and citizens to create a world in which we source and use resources sustainably. Our impact spans the entire life-cycle of the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the products we buy, from production to consumption and beyond.

**For further information – to request interviews:**

* **WRAP:** Ian Palmer, WRAP PRO: 07802 873 431 ian.palmer@wrap.org.uk @WRAP\_UK