Food Safety
HELPFUL HINTS FROM EXPERTS

Food Product Dates And Storage

(NAPSA)—You might be used to seeing the words "Sell By" stamped on a package of meat or poultry product. But does that stamp mean the product you buy will be unsafe after that date?

Experts say maybe not. A "Sell By" or "Best If Used By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires to help ensure best quality, but it is not a safety date.

After the date passes, the USDA says the product should still be safe if handled properly and kept at 40 °F or below for recommended storage times listed at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Similarly, a "Use By" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.

If an item is perishable, take it home immediately after purchase and refrigerate promptly. Freeze it if you can't use it within times recommended on the USDA storage chart, which is available on the Web site. Foods kept frozen continuously are safe indefinitely.

Safe Food Storage

The following guidelines can help protect perishables:

•Raw Meat And Poultry— Place in a container or sealed plastic bag to prevent juices from spilling onto other food or the refrigerator, which could cause cross-contamination. If you're not planning to use meat or poultry within two days, freeze it.

•Eggs—Store eggs in the origi-

Understanding food safety dates can help you keep your family safe and well fed.

nal carton and place them in the main compartment of the refrigerator—not the door. It is not necessary to wash eggs.

•Produce—Store perishable produce in the refrigerator. Throw away fresh fruits and vegetables that have not been used within two hours of cutting, peeling or cooking. If any fruit or vegetable has touched raw meat, poultry or seafood and will not be cooked immediately, throw it away.

•Leftovers—Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours. Use clean, shallow, covered containers for rapid cooling.

Additionally, be certain to follow any handling and preparation instructions on the food's packaging.

For more food safety information, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-(888) MP Hotline, or 1-(888) 674-6854. You can also type a question into "Ask Karen" at www.AskKaren.gov or visit www.fsis.usda.gov.