

Freshness Labelling as an Underestimated Factor Driving Food Waste

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Abstract

Freshness dates, next to sensory properties, provide consumers with information about the remaining shelf-life of food products. The aim of this study was to evaluate the influence of freshness labelling on a consumer rejection of food. A consumer sensory study was conducted among 180 participants from Poland. Eight different foods labelled with two date types ('use by' or 'best before') and four various freshness dates were examined. The freshness dates showed that the food product is either one day before the expiration date, expires on the day of evaluation or is one day or one month (three days in case of 'use by' samples) past the expiration date. The respondents had to assess if the product is suitable for consumption without tasting it. Despite the different dates, all of the samples of a particular product had the same freshness. The results showed that even fresh samples were rejected by 14.2-22.1% respondents. The suggested loss of freshness caused a significant increase in products' rejection. The frequency of rejection differed between food categories. Nearly half of the participants rejected 'use by' food products overdue by one day. In case of 'best before' expired samples ca. 40% of the participants did not accept the samples one day and one month after expiration. Such behaviour shows that there is still much confusion about different kinds of labels, which ultimately lead people to interpret any date label as a 'use by' date, and therefore, they throw away all food items that 'have expired', although these items are actually still safe to eat. Moreover, the results proved that freshness labelling is the key element of the packaging that may lead to unnecessary discard of food increasing the total volume of waste. Therefore, it is important to educate consumers to better understand the meaning of certain date type and, on the other hand, educate producers to establish freshness dates basing on both scientific evidence and on consumer sensory studies.

Keywords: food waste, food labelling, date labelling, shelf-life dates, best before

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