

NOVEMBER 2016 REPORT
SUFFOLK REGION PTA
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SAVE THE DATE

The holiday season is coming up and even though we try not to – many of us overindulge in the food category during this time. Did you know that for every dollar Americans spend on food, they chuck about ten cent's worth into the trash? It may not sound like much, but it adds up fast. For an average family of four, that's approximately \$1,500 wasted in a year's time. Food is the largest source of garbage in landfills and it contributes significantly to the production of methane, that in turn adds to the growing issue of global warming.

Busy lifestyles, picky eaters, poor planning, etc. are just a few of the reasons that so much of what we buy ends up in the trash. Food labels and dates also contribute to the problem. What do the labels "Sell By" and "Best If Used By" really mean? According to a professor of food science at Cornell, these labels are really more about food *quality* than food safety. Food may not be at its peak after the date stamped and can become stale or change in color. But the professor states that quality problems in most cases are not related to food safety.

Dana Gunders author of Waste-Free Kitchen Handbook states that "food borne illness comes from contamination, not from the natural process of decay, and our senses are equipped to recognize decay." Food that has become rancid, or spoils in other ways are likely to look, smell and taste bad before they are actually unsafe to eat.

The USDA offers these general definitions:

"Sell By" – This is the date manufacturers suggest retailers remove it from the shelves. These dates vary according to the product. For instance milk, assuming it has been properly refrigerated, should last 5 to 7 days past its "Sell By" date.

"Best By and Use By" – These terms tell you when to eat (or freeze) a product for best quality. For example, a bag of crackers may get soft instead of being crispy after these dates.

When purchasing groceries, know your family's likes and dislikes, take into account your storage in cupboards, fridge and freezer and do check the dates. If you are ever in doubt about any food that may have gone bad, of course do not consume it and throw it out. But the less you do, the better for your budget and the better for our environment. Bon appétit!