



## New Food Date Labels Starting July 1, 2026

*What California's AB 660 means for Feeding San Diego's agency partners*

Starting July 1, 2026, a new California law (AB 660) changes the wording manufacturers and retailers use on food date labels. The goal is to reduce confusion that leads to good, safe food being thrown away. Here's what's changing and what it means for your agency.

### The Two New Label Terms

Going forward, packaged food sold in California will use one of two standardized phrases instead of the many different versions you may be used to seeing ("sell by," "best before," "expires on," etc.):

| Label                                                                | What it means                                                                                                               | What to do                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "BEST if Used by"<br>or<br>"BEST if Used or Frozen by"<br>or<br>"BB" | <b>A quality date.</b><br><br>The food may not be at peak freshness or flavor after this date, but it is still safe to eat. | Safe to accept, sort, and distribute using normal quality checks (look, smell, texture).                                          |
| "USE by"<br>or<br>"USE by or Freeze by"<br>or<br>"UB"                | <b>A safety date.</b><br><br>After this date, the food is considered a food safety risk — not just lower quality.           | Do not accept, sort, or distribute.<br><br>Items past their USE by date must be pulled and discarded, not donated or distributed. |

### What's Going Away

- "Sell by" dates will no longer appear on the front of new packaging\* — that phrase was always meant for store stock rotation, not a signal about safety or quality. **\*Note:** Eggs may still have a "sell-by" date in addition to the new required date.
- Some retailers may still use a coded version of "sell by" for internal stock rotation — this won't be easily readable and isn't meant for client-facing use.

### What This Means for Your Agency

- Donations may have a mix of old and new labels for a while. Products made before July 1, 2026 can be sold and donated with their original labels, so both systems will be in circulation for a time.
- No new paperwork for your agency. AB 660 applies to manufacturers, processors, and retailers — not to nonprofit distribution. **The core change for you is applying the "USE by" rule above.**

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*Questions? Reach out to your Feeding San Diego Neighborhood Partnerships Coordinator.*