Effect of date marking terminology on food discarding behaviour in households

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Misinterpretation of date marking by consumers is very often given as one of the more important causes of food waste.

However, little is as yet known about the size of this effect and how the terminology itself influences this behavior.

Lack of knowledge on how no date marking influences the consumers’ behavior.

Commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs (currently Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality)
Objective

Gain insight in the effect on food discarding behaviour related to long shelf life products in households if:

• NO date marking is placed on the package
• An ALTERNATIVE terminology is used on the package
Approach

1 week

Sorting task

Online task

Focusgroep discussions

2 weeks
Participants

- 86 participants
  - 85% female
- Average age 40.5 years. Range 19-76 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type consumer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families with children</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 yrs</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 person households</td>
<td>31%</td>
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- Participants were deselected if they indicated never to discard long shelflife food products.
- From the WFBR Taste/SenTo Panel of consumers
Part 1: Results

On Average, **12% less** products are discarded when NO DATE is included on-pack, compared with products BEYOND the BBD. Differences between product categories are large (range: -23% sugar syrup to +5% for juices)
Part 2: Online task

List of alternative terminology

• Quality guaranteed until [date]
• Inspect, smell and taste after [date]
• At its best before [date]
• Produced on [date]
• Long shelf life
Part 2: Results online task

- Changing into ‘long shelflife (without a date) led to 31% less products being discarded

- When the term ‘Quality guaranteed until [date]’ is used, 5% less is thrown away.

- The terms ‘At its best if used before [date]’ and ‘Produced on [date]’ led to more discards (+4% and +6% respectively).

- The term ‘Inspect, smell and taste after [date]’ had no influence on discarding behaviour as compared to the current label of best before date.

N=85
Results (2)

- In the ranking test, participants indicated to find the terminology of ‘long shelflife’ (which was discarded the least) not very attractive.

- It seems that the attractiveness of a term is not necessarily related to the potential of a term to influence behaviour (in the case of food waste & long shelflife products).
Part 3 results focus groups

Consumers seek ‘security’
- Food safety
- Reduced quality

- Dry, limited number of ingredients
  - Products like:
    - Flour, coffee, tea, rice, pasta, sugar, dried herbs
    - Soda drink

- Wet, multiple ingredients, vulnerable ingredients.
  - Products like:
    - Meat, fish, egg
    - Milk / dairy products
    - Juices
    - Sauces
Questions?

THANK YOU!!

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