

Consumer research study to identify new ways of expressing date marking that meet consumers' information needs whilst minimising food waste

Consultation on date marking policy options of the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste and of the Working Group on Food Information to Consumers Regulation







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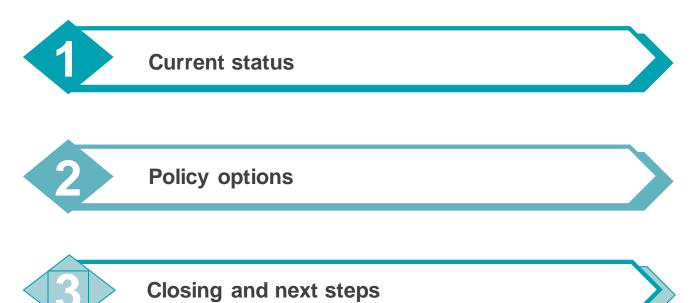


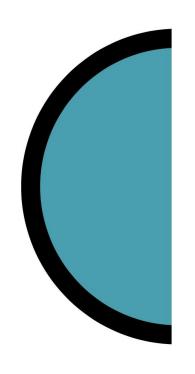
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Agenda





1. Current status

Main objectives of the project

Objectives



- To better understand how current date marking rules and their implementation affect consumers' decisions to consume/use or discard foods
- To identify new ways of expressing date marking (e.g., in terms of terminology, format, visual presentation) that meet consumers information needs regarding food safety (health) and quality whilst minimizing food waste behaviour
- To test the effectiveness of these new ways of expressing date marking (vs. the current one) in preventing food waste linked to consumers misunderstanding of the meaning of these dates

Overall Approach

Task 2

Design and execution of behavioural

research

Online focus groups

Task 1 Collection and analysis of existing evidence Review of evidence and inventory Stakeholder interviews

Development of policy options

Online survey

Laboratory/online

experiment

Additional VR lab experiment

Task 3

Integrated analysis of results and policy recommendations

Preliminary plan for the quantitative results

Overall analysis of results

Triangulation of results

Policy recommendations

REPORT 1

REPORT 2.1

REPORT 2.2

FINAL REPORT

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REPORT 2.1

REPORT 2.2

FINAL REPORT

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Task 1 - Collection and analysis of existing evidence

List of activities conducted

Sub-Tasks



- Literature review and desk research
- Stakeholders in-depth interviews (National authority [N=32], academica [N=5], European Orgaisation [N=8], Food Business Operator [N=7], NGO [N=4], SME [N=1], in total 57)
- Development of policy options

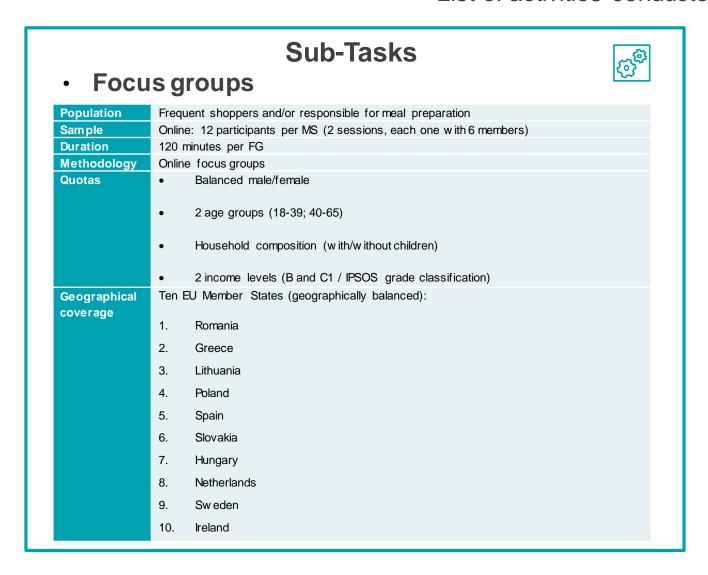
Objectives



- Collect evidence on consumer behaviour on food waste linked to date marking.
- Identify the policy options to be tested in the experimental phase.
- Gather information to fine-tune and establish the methodology for the next Tasks.

Task 2 - Design and execution of behavioural research

List of activities conducted



Objectives



- Identify the main factors influencing consumer understanding, acceptance and use of date marking.
- Explore the consumers' first reactions/impressions to the new set of policy options.
- Further develop alternative policy options for input to the next phases of the research

Development of policy options

Principles of policy options for date marking



- (1) Increase salience of information using, wherever possible, simple graphic elements (i.e., colour);
- (2) Text and graphic should be simple and clear, people have been shown to think that 'if it is hard to read then it is hard to do' (Song & Schwarz 2008);
- (3) Avoid any **complex numerical information**;
- (4) Avoid as far as possible the **use of different formats** (across countries / industries / products), because they reduce familiarity and credibility.

Outcomes from the focus groups

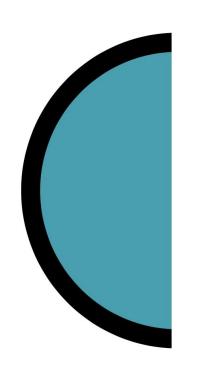
Summary of key learning

- 1. General perception date labelling **lacks consistency** when it comes to size, format and location, being often **hard to be found and/or properly understood**.
- 2. Date marking is mainly used to **assess the freshness** of packaged perishable products and to give **priority** to what should be consumed first
- 3. Checking dates tends to be considered more relevant for products that may **become toxic**, usually perishable products of animal origin (e.g. fish, chicken, milk), whereas it loses relevance for those products that may lose quality in their product attributes (texture, aroma, etc.) over time, but <u>not</u> become dangerous, which are usually dry products (cereals, coffee, spices, etc.)
- 4. For those consumers who understand the difference between the use by vs. the best before date, the best before date conveys a sort of "recommendation" or "advice" to consume the product up to the date, with no indication of what to do after that date, whereas the use by date connotes a sense of "warning" or "prohibition" not to consume the product after that date. Swedish and Irish consumers seem to be better educated on date labelling issues thanks to have been taught "Home Economics" at school.
- 5. Consumers who do not differentiate both types of date properly tend to consider both of them a sort of "generic expiry date" and they do not usually think there will ultimately be any relevant difference between both types of dates, meaning they will not affect their behaviour when faced with a product that is out of date, whatever date it might be.

Outcomes from the focus groups

Summary of key learning (cont.)

- **6.** Type of product, food management experience and consumer profile seem to be the variables that better explain consumers' attitudes and behaviours regarding date marking.
- 7. Four different consumers profiles have been detected according to the relevance they attribute to date labelling, and their attitude and behaviour with respect to consuming products that are out of date: the Practical, the Rule-Abider, the Cautious and the Carefree.
- 8. Sensory checking (looking and smelling, plus touching or tasting, if appropriate) is the main strategy consumers develop to avoid waste when faced with food that may not be in good condition. On the other hand, they develop strategies to prolong the shelf life of products by freezing, cooking at high temperature, transforming or storing them properly.
- 9. Date marking is considered a way to **protect both consumers and companies** so that eventual **health** problems among consumers and **lawsuits** against companies are prevented. Consumers usually think that the expiry, use by and best before dates **last longer** than displayed on the packaging to "play it safe" and that this leads to **more food** waste than occurred before date marking existed.
- 10. Overconsumption and lack of smart shopping plan are considered the main reason that lead consumers to waste food. However, most participants try to avoid wasting food for conscience or environmental or economic reasons. The older segment (40-65 y.o.) seems more sensitive to food waste, although the younger segment (18-39 y.o.) is also developing some food waste awareness thanks to have been educated in sustainability-related issues.



2. Policy options

Text based options

Use by

01 Jan 2022

Do not consume after

01 Jan 2022

Best before 01 Jan 2022

Best quality before 01 Jan 2022

> Best before 01 Jan 2022

Usually good after

Best before 01 Jan 2022

Often good after

Best before 01 Jan 2022

then check look, smell, taste

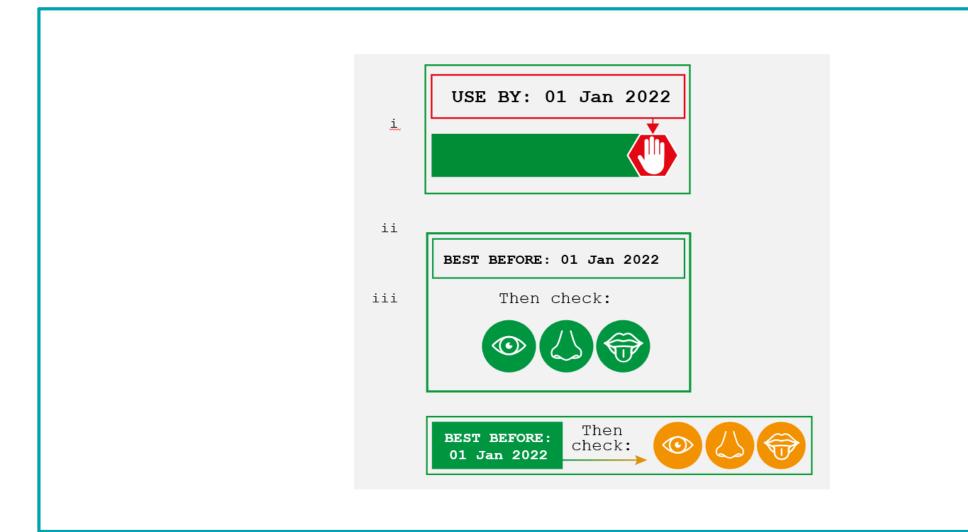








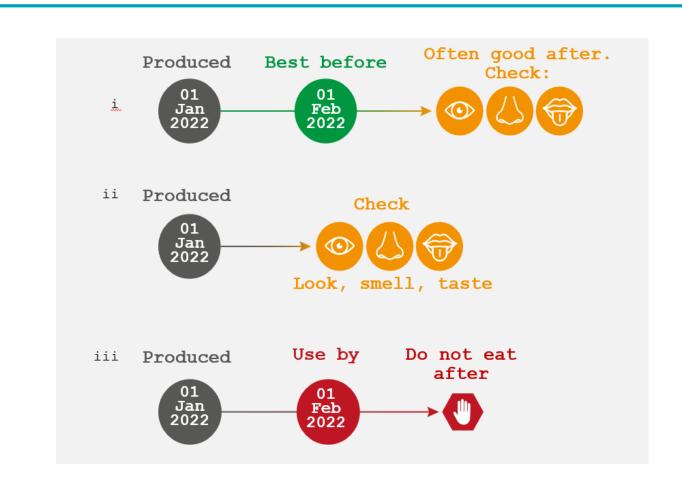














Currently used in the UK and other countries

Currently used in the UK

i. Past my date?Look, smell, tasteDon't waste



Currently used in the DK, DE, PT, AT, IT, PL and Switzerland

i. Often good after Look, smell, taste

Currently used in BE, ES, PT, FR

i. Before you throw me awayCheck my stateLook, smell, taste

Examples of date marking options on food products



Labels applied to products for illustrative purposes only





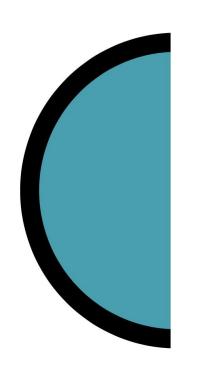












3. Closing and next steps

Closing and next steps



- Consultation EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste and the Working Group on Food Information to Consumers Regulation
- Develop survey and collect additional information
- Analyse the outcomes and prepare experimental designs
- Conduct (lab/online) experiments
- Triangulate the outcomes



Thank you