

Dates on food products confuse consumers

By Mary MacVean, Los Angeles Times

Ted Labuza ate sour cream on Tuesday that was two weeks past its due date. And lived to tell the tale.

Dana Gunders went to the market and found fat-free milk in quarts that had no date label; the half-gallon had a “sell-by” date, and another container from a different brand had a “best-by” date.

Even though nearly all consumers make some decisions about what to throw away based on those stamped dates, they cannot rely on them, said Gunders, food and agriculture staff scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

She is the coauthor of a report issued Wednesday by the NRDC and the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic.

Those dates are manufacturers’ suggestions for when an item is at its peak, or are efforts to help stores manage their inventory – not indications of food safety, the report says.

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