



NATURE'S VOICE

For the 3 million Members and online activists of the Natural Resources Defense Council

What's a "Sell By" Date? In California, Soon It Will Be History

They're two small words—but eliminating them stands to make a big impact. Last fall, California became the first state in the country to ban the use of consumer-facing "sell by" dates, part of a landmark bill cosponsored by NRDC aimed at standardizing the dizzying array of date labels on food that have long confounded grocery shoppers. Too often, consumers mistake "sell by" dates—which are used by stores for stock rotation—for when a product is no longer safe to eat.

"Game-changing" is how NRDC food waste advocate Madeline Keating describes the move by California, which now stands as a model for other states. That might seem like an overstatement until you consider that nearly 10 percent of consumer food waste is

associated with the misinterpretation of date labels, contributing to the shocking fact that approximately 40 percent of the food grown and produced in the United States is never eaten. By the middle of next year in California, the label "use by" will be used to communicate product safety and "best if used by" to communicate peak quality.

The new law was a big win, but it wasn't the only highlight of a year that saw Keating and the rest of her team make major strides as part of the nationwide campaign to reduce U.S. food waste by 50 percent by 2030. NRDC's Food Matters initiative provided technical support and resources to partners in 20 cities coast to coast, from Los

Angeles to Detroit to Boston, diverting more than 35,000 tons of food waste from disposal via programs such as prevention, food rescue, and composting. Keating's team aims to replicate the success of these programs across an expanding network of U.S. cities. "Food waste is a complicated issue with lots of factors, but that also means there are a lot of solutions," Keating says. The impacts are myriad as well. Each year the average American spends \$788 on food that is never eaten. Meanwhile, diverting good food from landfills can help feed the 13.5 percent of households in the United States that lack consistent access to nutritious food while—yes—also tackling the climate crisis: decaying food in landfills produces significant amounts of methane, a climate super-pollutant.

