Information sheet

Freezing guidance to prevent food waste

Having clear and consistent freezing guidance on packs will help to reduce consumer confusion and support better understanding around the use of food. This leads to reduced waste and food safety risks.

Consumers are currently throwing away around £6.7 billion of food and drink each year due to it 'not being used in time'. Much of this food could have been frozen and eaten at a later date.

Confusion about whether a product is suitable for freezing and how best to freeze it to maximise its quality are two of the reasons why food is thrown away rather than frozen.

Outlined below are five key recommendations for how food businesses can help their customers and the environment by helping them make the best out of the food they buy.

1. Make it clear it can be frozen

WRAP's <u>Retailer Survey</u> showed that 63% of freezable products carried freezing guidance and 44% displayed the snowflake logo. So the first step is to **review your products** to determine their <u>suitability for home-freezing</u>. Where appropriate include the 'snowflake' logo on the label with text 'suitable for home freezing', or equivalent.

Here are a few examples of products, found in the survey, that illustrate the potential for customer confusion:

 25% of all **yoghurts** displayed guidance 'not to freeze' when they are suitable to freeze.

- 12% of milk packs stated 'not suitable for freezing', while 24% carried freezing quidance.
- 4% of orange juice advised against freezing, while 19% carried freezing guidance.

Key barriers: consumers not knowing ...

- What can be frozen
- How long after purchase it can be frozen
- How long it can be kept frozen
- What to freeze it in / any pre-preparation required in order to freeze it
- How to defrost / cook and use it

2. Use 'freeze before date mark' labelling

92% of respondents to a <u>WRAP survey</u> were regularly freezing fresh/refrigerated food at home. Of those, one in four froze food bought on special offer/promotion. 59% thought they had to freeze the food on the day of purchase.

To extend the life of food beyond its 'use by' date, it is safe to freeze it up to the day before the date and then defrost and use it within 24 hours. This ensures the overall 'use by' date is not exceeded. The same guidance can be used for 'best before' dated products, to ensure they are frozen at their best quality, or labelled to 'freeze as soon as possible after purchase'.

Using a 'freeze before date mark, defrost and use within 24 hours' label is recommended rather than 'freeze on day of

purchase'. A WRAP/Food Standards Agency freezer guidance labelling decision tree has been produced to guide manufacturers. In a WRAP survey, around 35% of respondents said they would make use of the flexibility a 'freeze before date mark' instruction would give them. While those buying food specifically to freeze it at home would continue to freeze it as soon as they got home. Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Waitrose are all rolling out the new 'freeze before date mark' label.

3. Provide 'use within x months of freezing' and defrosting guidance

Help consumers understand how to use the food they freeze:

- Once foods are in the freezer, they can be safely stored there forever – but the quality will deteriorate. Useful guidance would be to label 'use / best within 3 months of freezing'.
- 45% of freezable products carried defrosting guidance, but almost 20% gave instructions to freeze with no defrosting quidance. A useful label would be 'defrost in the fridge, cook thoroughly'.

4. Use logos and text appropriately

The snowflake logo is used to indicate the product is suitable for home-freezing and a crossed out snowflake means the product is not. For products that have already been frozen, written guidance not to refreeze the product would be more helpful than a crossed out snowflake logo.

Help consumers understand:

- Foods can be frozen and defrosted once and stored in the fridge for up to two days.
- Never to re-freeze raw meat (including) poultry) or fish that has been defrosted.

It is possible to re-freeze home cooked meat once, as long as it has been cooled before going into the freezer.

5. Get creative

Freezing and defrosting guidance can be communicated on-pack, online and in-store.

Figure 1 – On-pack freezing guidance

Discovery tortilla wraps



Figure 2 - Freezing guidance online



"Can I freeze Müller Yogurt? "Our yogurt is best enjoyed straight from the fridge. However,

our customers have told us that when decanted into suitable containers and frozen, our Müller yogurts make a delicious frozen dessert".

Figure 3 - In-store communications to promote freezing extra

items, bought on promotion



Guidance about how to make the most of the freezer can be incorporated into customerfacing communications using Love Food Hate Waste material. Useful supplementary guidance to help consumers includes:

- Divide packs into portions before freezing.
- Date and label foods put in the freezer.
- Wrap foods well to avoid freezer burn.

To find out more

Grocery sector research is available at www.wrap.org.uk/groceryresearch. Enquiries to: Sophie.Easteal@wrap.org.uk 01295 819685.

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