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PRESS RELEASE: Moving from “Use by” to “Best before” dates: can we trust the sniff test?

Recently, some producers have moved from displaying “Use by” to “Best before” dates on their fresh pasteurised milk products. This decision has the potential to dramatically reduce consumer waste of fresh milk, one of the most frequently wasted products consumers buy. The use of “Best before” dates therefore relies on the consumer assessing the quality of the product as it is used, presumably through assessing appearance, smell and perhaps taste. The decision to change the type of date used will be based on a thorough risk assessment of the likelihood of contamination of the milk with pathogens, most likely *Listeria monocytogenes*, and the potential for it to grow to dangerous levels.

Phil Voysey, a Microbiologist at Campden BRI states: “*It is vital to base decisions to move from “Use by” to “Best before” on good data. Consumer assessment of milk quality before they use it is not going to include pathogens they can’t smell such as Listeria monocytogenes. Consumers may not even be aware that there is the potential for pathogens to be able to grow in their milk. In essence, the sniff test would not necessarily assure a safe product.*”

This view is reiterated by the UK Food Standards Agency’s Chief Executive Emily Miles, in her blog on 25th January. Campden BRI is seeking members for a club-funded project looking to provide a risk assessment and pooled historical data for companies that wish to consider a move from “Use by” date to “Best before” dates on pasteurised fresh milk. The project aims to provide participants with a resource that can be drawn on to support their own risk assessments and enable them to do what the UK Food Standards Agency call, “a robust assessment of microbiological risk”.

Phil continues: “*A decision to switch from one date to another is a significant move. We want to provide useful data to companies that may not have the resources to embark on a risk assessment and data analysis programme to support their switch. The collaborative approach proposed here has the potential to accelerate the process for any member of the consortium and hopefully reduce food waste.*”

The project will compare growth rates of potential pathogens with those of spoilage flora. Sensory analysis of milk will also be used to examine potential shelf-life extension. A risk assessment of the likelihood of the presence of pathogens will be carried out, and this will be greatly enhanced by the provision of anonymised data from the consortium members.

To participate in this project, please contact greg.jones@campdenbri.co.uk

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About Campden BRI:

Campden BRI (www.campdenbri.co.uk) has over 2,500 member companies from 80 countries, including all of the top 10 UK retailers, the top 15 global food and drink manufacturers and many of the world’s biggest brands. It provides technical, legislative and scientific support and research consultancy
services to the food and drink industry worldwide. Campden BRI has a comprehensive “farm to fork” range of services covering agri-food production, analysis and testing, processing and manufacturing, safety, training and technical information services. Members and clients benefit from industry-leading facilities for analysis, product and process development, and sensory and consumer studies, which include a specialist brewing and wine division.

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