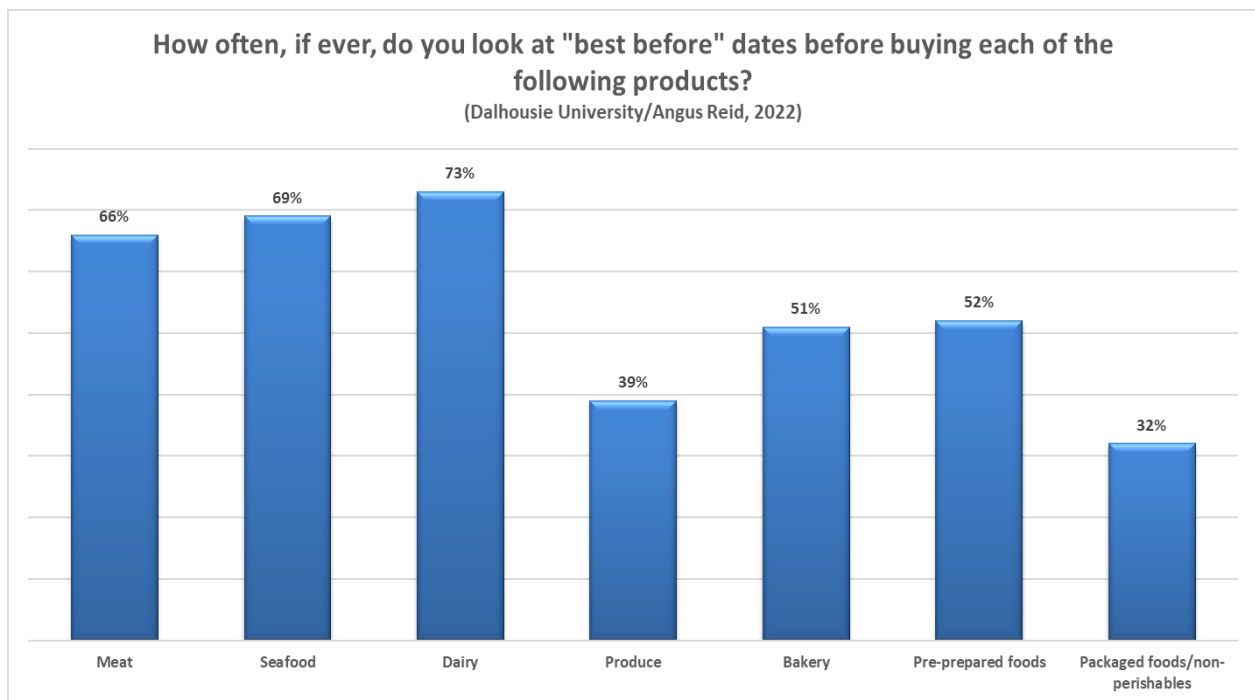


Majority of Canadians oppose eliminating “best before” dates on food products to reduce food waste, according to new report

HALIFAX, NS. (August 25, 2022) – The **Agri-Food Analytics Lab** at **Dalhousie University**, in partnership with **Angus Reid**, is releasing a new report on “best before” dates¹ and food waste.

It has been suggested numerous times that “best before” dates will generate more food waste. Consumers will be influenced by dates shown on food packages, whether they are expiry² or “best before” dates.³⁴ In recent months, several grocers in Europe like Morrison’s and Waitrose have opted to eliminate “best before” dates with the intention to reduce food waste.⁵ Despite the fact that our food safety regime here in Canada is a little different, our lab wanted to know how important these dates are to Canadians, and if consumers here would be willing to purchase products without them.



¹ “best before” dates in Canada are about quality, not safety. It quite literally means that the food was best, or in its finest form, before the said date. After that date means that it’s beginning its slow decline in quality (Second Harvest, 2022).

² In Canada, only five types of food have true expiry dates: baby formula, meal replacements or supplement bars, meal supplement drinks, formulated liquid diets and foods used in low-energy diets (the last two both require a prescription). These foods should not be eaten past their expiry date (Second Harvest, 2022).

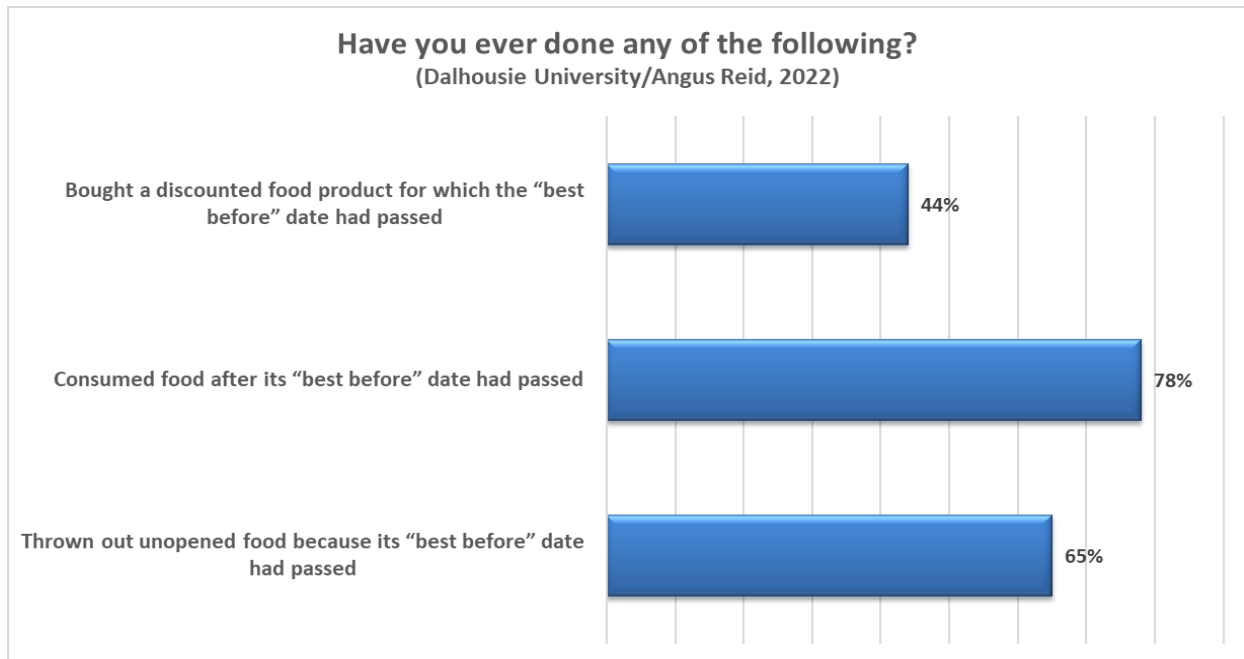
³ Li, B., Maclaren, V., & Soma, T. (2020). Urban household food waste: drivers and practices in Toronto, Canada. *British Food Journal*.

⁴ Van Bommel, A., & Parizeau, K. (2020). Is it food or is it waste? The materiality and relational agency of food waste across the value chain. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 13(2), 207-220.

⁵ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202208/1272194.shtml>

When Canadians are asked how often they look at “best before” dates, frequency will vary greatly depending on the food category. While a total of 73% of Canadians will always look at “best before” dates for dairy products, only 32% will look at dates for packaged foods/non-perishables. Women and older consumers are more likely to always look at “best before” dates.

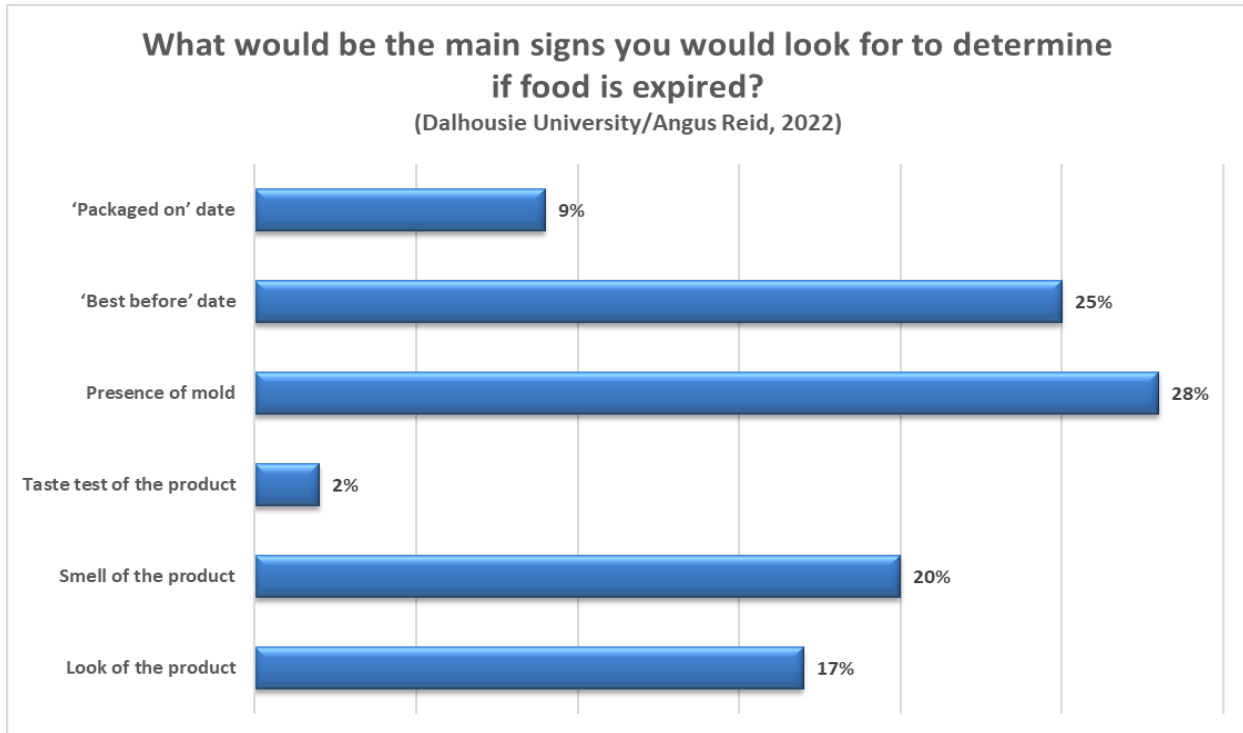
The survey probed how consumers consider “best before” dates when purchasing or consuming different food products. While a total of 44% of Canadians have bought a discounted food product for which the “best before” date had passed, 78% consumed food after its “best before” date had passed. A total of 65% has thrown out unopened food because its “best before” date had passed.



Consumers have different ways to manage risks and will do different things to determine whether a product is safe to eat or not. While 28% of Canadians will look for the presence of mold, 25% will rely on “best before” dates as an indicator of food safety. A total of 20% will rely on smell, and 17% will rely on the appearance of the food product itself. It is important to note that most microorganisms that can make people sick do not change the smell or the look of the food.

“The results of the survey open up some rich perspective into Canadian consuming habits. It really depends on the sub-category of food, with greater perceived risk of animal-based foods and prepared foods perishability, which can carry greater health threats if the items are going bad,” said Dr. **Mark Juhasz**, Research Associate at Dalhousie University’s Agri-Food Analytics Lab. “There is a broad spectrum of Canadian consumer habits taking place, some more inclined towards trusting the food product, and others more risk-averse. This is a fertile ground for more research, maybe even comparing perceptions of ‘best before’ compared to expiry dates.”

The results really point to **food safety contradictions** in Canada. While many Canadians are willing to buy and consume food after the “best before” date has passed, many will throw away unopened food products.



The willingness to buy a product in Canada without a “best before” date will again vary greatly, depending on the food category. While a total of 68% of Canadians would be willing to buy produce without an expiry date, only 15% would be willing to do the same with dairy products. There are not many statistical variations between provinces, but **men** are more likely to be willing to buy food products without a “best before” on them, except for produce. **Younger** consumers are more willing to buy food without a “best before” date, except for dairy.

When asked specifically about whether Canadians support eliminating “best before” dates to reduce food waste, most Canadians are against such a measure. Only 27% of Canadians either strongly support or support eliminating “best before” dates. **Quebec** is where the level of support for such a measure is the highest, at 36%, followed by **Saskatchewan** at 28%. The lowest support is in **Alberta**, at 22%.

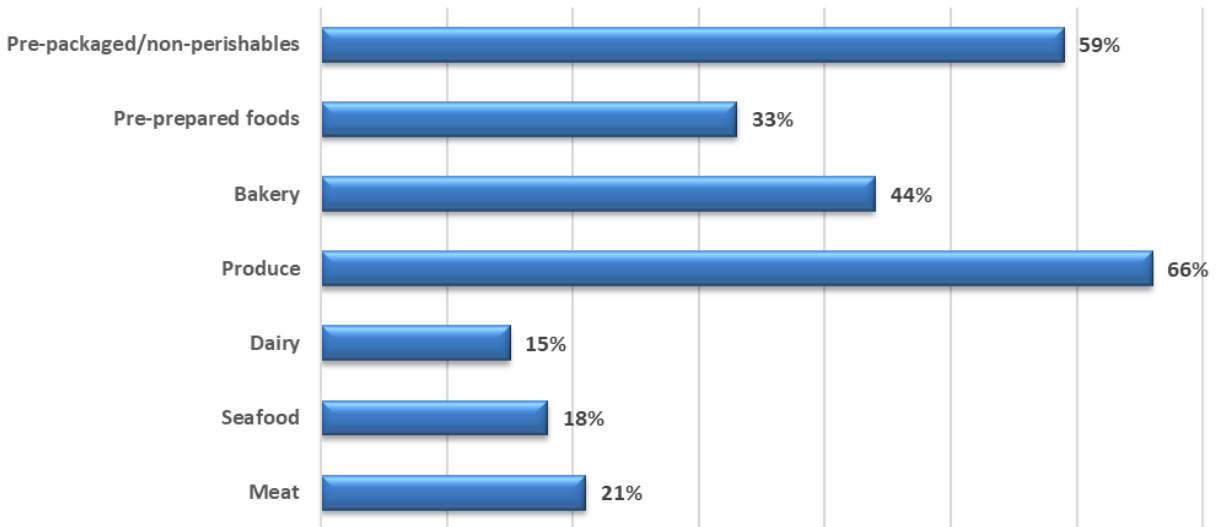
“In light of these results, it is obvious that the food safety culture in Canada is quite strong,” stated Dr. **Sylvain Charlebois**, Director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab. “Unlike for grocers in Europe, removing ‘best before’ dates will likely be viewed as an unpopular gesture, at least for now,” said Charlebois.

According to the Global Food Security Index, Canada is the 7th most food secure country in the world. But when it comes to food safety, Canada is 1st in the world, followed by the United States and Ireland. The focus on food safety in Canada has been historically higher in comparison to other countries.⁶

⁶ <https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/project/food-security-index/Index>

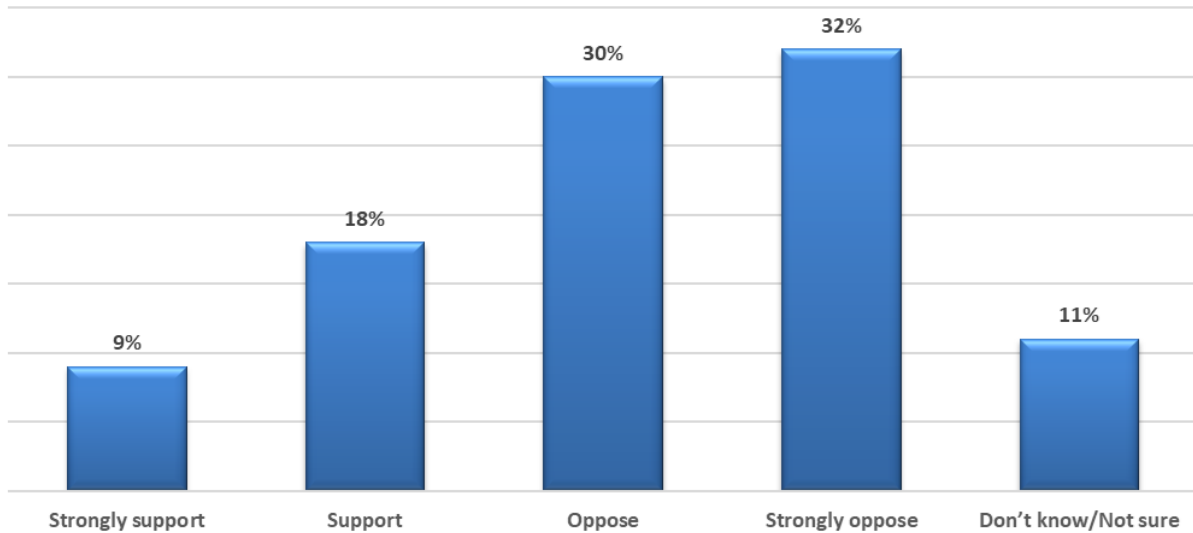
Would you purchase a product in each of the following categories if it did not have a "best before" date on it?

(Dalhousie University/Angus Reid, 2022)



Do you support or oppose eliminating "best before" dates on food packages in order to reduce food waste?

(Dalhousie University/Angus Reid, 2022)



End of report.

Full report here: <https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food.html>

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Methodology: A representative survey of Canadians was conducted in August 2022, in partnership with Angus Reid. 1,508 Canadians participated in this survey.

Margin of Error: +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. Any discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

Research Ethics Certificate: No. 2021-5816.

Disclosure: Funding for this survey was provided by **Angus Reid** and **Dalhousie University**.