

# Determining the quality of leafy salads: Past, present and future

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Postharvest Biology and Technology, Volume 180, October 2021, 111630

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## Abstract

The relatively high proportion of avoidable waste from leafy salads and the under-consumption of fruits and vegetables generally is contributing toward renewed interest in the value of on-pack dates, particularly those that indicate quality. Current methods of predicting shelf-life in fresh vegetables and salad are relatively conservative due to the high variability of the product and few reliable markers that can be used to predict shelf-life. This is evidenced by the proportion of wastage in this category where fresh vegetables and salad account for almost a quarter of all avoidable food waste by weight. We have looked at the historical context in which date markings have been derived, how they function currently and look at how the current system could be improved. We review the three primary factors that influence the quality of a product – microbiology, visual quality, aroma – and suggest that if more accurate predictions of shelf-life are to be obtained non-destructive methods of testing need to be developed in order to provide the consumer with accurate information about the current state of the product.