Investigators who maintain their own food stocks because they house animals in IACUC-approved satellite locations and/or use food enrichment treats or nutritional rewards for their animals must follow food maintenance and storage guidelines as described below.

According to the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (National Research Council, 2011), page 66,

The user should know the date of manufacture and other factors that affect the food’s shelf life. Stale food or food transported and stored inappropriately can become deficient in nutrients. Upon receipt, bags of feed should be examined to ensure that they are intact and unstained to help ensure that their contents have not been potentially exposed to vermin, penetrated by liquids, or contaminated. Careful attention should be paid to quantities received in each shipment, and stock should be rotated so that the oldest food is used first.

Areas in which diets and diet ingredients are processed or stored should be kept clean and enclosed to prevent the entry of pests. Food stocks should be stored off the floor on pallets, racks, or carts in a manner that facilitates sanitation. Opened bags of food should be stored in vermin-proof containers to minimize contamination and to avoid the potential spread of pathogens. Exposure to elevated storage room temperatures, extremes in relative humidity, unsanitary conditions, and insects and other vermin hastens food deterioration.

All animal food must be stored according to the manufacturer’s instructions or consistent with best practices. If food requires refrigeration or should be kept frozen based on the label or manufacturer’s information, it must be maintained that way. If it is kept at normal room temperature, it should be stored in a sealed, vermin-proof container, kept dry, and be protected from temperature extremes.

**Food expiration:** If a food product has an expiration date, it must be used or discarded by that date. If information from the manufacturer includes shelf life, then that information should be used upon receipt to label the food container with a corresponding expiration date. In the absence of an expiration date, or if specific shelf life information is not available, all diets or other food products must be used or discarded six months from their milling/manufacturer date. If the food product packaging does not have a production date or expiration date indicated, it should be considered to have a discard date six months from the purchase or receipt date.

**Food storage containers:** All primary food storage containers should be labelled with either the discard date (preferred) or the manufacturing date, and the labeling must make it clear whether this is a discard
date or a manufacturing date to avoid confusion about shelf life. If smaller aliquots are taken from the primary food storage container for storage elsewhere, then that additional container must be labelled with a discard date corresponding to the primary packaging. When fresh produce is used as a diet or treat, it must be refrigerated and discarded when it shows any signs of degradation or spoilage.

**Feeding dishes:** Discard dates do not need to be transferred to the final bowl/dish/hopper/etc., but it is important to ensure that uneaten and undated food products are not allowed to remain in the animal facility or procedural use area for an extended time. For example, if a behavioral chamber is not in active use for a period of weeks, the reward pellets must be removed from the dispensing hopper to avoid later feeding of out-of-date food. If containers are re-used and refilled with food items over time, they should be cleaned and sanitized every six months and be labelled with a last-cleaned date.