

TRENDS IN TRACEABILITY

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING YOU NEED TO KNOW

By Keith Loria

Contributing Writer

TRACEABILITY CONTINUES TO BE top-of-mind for the food industry in 2016. There has been unprecedented national attention on foodborne illness outbreaks, which reveals a real opportunity for all members of the food supply chain to evaluate the effectiveness of their traceability programs.

Angela Fernandez, vice president of retail grocery and foodservice at GS1 US, notes GS1 Standards (such as the UPC barcode used at grocery store checkouts) play a major role in traceability as they provide a common language from which supply chain partners can operate more efficiently.

"There are many more standards beyond the barcode used at checkout that enable supply chain efficiency

between trading partners," she said. "For produce traceability purposes, companies identify their products at the case level using Global Trade Item Numbers (GTINs) that identify the product and batch or lot where the product came from. This information is encoded into GS1-128 barcodes, applied to product cases, and scanned at various points in the supply chain, which can enable more efficient recalls."

The organization administers the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) with three other produce industry organizations — Produce Marketing Association (PMA), the Canadian Produce Marketing Association



▲ An example of a hand-held traceability software platform. Photo: LINKFRESH

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(CPMA) and United Fresh Produce Association.

“This collaboration is designed to help the industry maximize the effectiveness of current traceability procedures, while developing a standardized industry approach to enhance the speed and efficiency of traceability systems for the future,” Fernandez said. “Consumers have moved from simply buying what was available at the store, to the desire for greater validation of product ingredients, allergens and other information about products prior to purchase.”

Recent IRI research reveals growth in shopping along the perimeter of the store has grown twice as fast as total food and beverage purchases. As consumers become more empowered to learn more about the food they eat, traceability has become a priority for growers, suppliers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers who are looking to deliver the supply chain transparency that is demanded by the consumer.

Ron Myers, executive vice president at LINKFRESH, notes the company provides ERP software specifically for the fresh produce industry, aimed at helping traceability.

“We’re seeing increasing adaption of electronic data capture and different technologies for traceability,” he said. “This is an industry that’s not usually leading-edge adaptors, but people are realizing its importance.”

NEW PRODUCT ROUNDUP

Katie Moore, industry marketing manager of GE Digital’s food and beverage practice, notes new technology has made things much more efficient in traceability methods.

“Before when there was an issue with a product, you would have to isolate the product because you didn’t have the visibility and insight into what products were produced to a level of detail we felt comfortable with,” she said. “Now, because of new levels of automation, sensors and software, we can accurately pinpoint where things are, which is wonderful.”



Angela Fernandez

Dave Donat, president of Produce Pro Software, notes some of the most recent buzz revolves around recall readiness — the ability to quickly and accurately respond if the USDA comes knocking on your door.

“Our customers want to show not only that their own facility/process are clean; but also quickly show their supply chain,” he said. “Produce Pro is an essential part of traceability. All of

the recordkeeping for our customers is stored within our software.

“We track the inbound Vendor Lot Number and product code (GTIN) of everything received. When product is moved within the warehouse, or between warehouses, that information goes with it.”

Customers are increasingly demanding that suppliers know where their food came from and they are making them prove it. Audits in the past have focused primarily on cleanliness, which is still vital. However, now



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“THERE’S NO REQUIREMENT ABOUT USING TECHNOLOGY, BUT IT’S MUCH SIMPLER THAN THE PAPER AND PEN METHOD.”

Katie Moore, industry marketing manager of GE Digital’s food and beverage practice

there is a trend toward auditing the traceability itself.

“Does the supplier have the ability to quickly provide traceability, for any product that is shipped to a customer? Are the operations at the supplier rigorous enough that the recall info is bulletproof? It takes significant technology advances to make those statements true, and yet remain an efficient distribution operation,” Donat said. “That is what Produce Pro does for them.”

John Sammon, senior vice president and general manager of intelligent checklists at ParTech, notes the company offers a solution called SureCheck, which ensures safer foods and compliance with recently passed

HACCP requirements for all types of customers, from restaurants and grocery stores to contract food services and food distributors. With SureCheck Software, all data is captured and uploaded to the cloud.

“It’s an enterprise solution that both reaches out and receives information from many, many entities. For example, we’re in 7,000 Walgreens around the world and each has an individual hand-held device dedicated to the store synched up to our cloud-based solutions,” he said. “We send information down on a daily basis on food safety; checklists that managers have to follow.”

The checklists ensure that everyone is doing what they’re supposed to be doing and provide a historical record of everything that is done, which helps them comply with the new laws under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).

UNDERSTANDING FSMA

The passage of FSMA in 2011 represented the most sweeping food safety reform in the last 70 years.

While the recent rules in 2015 affect some supply chain business processes, they do not specifically mandate traceability processes.

“For the past few years — even without specific rulings on traceability — leading supply chain partners have already been focusing on improving their ability to trace products as they move through different stops in the supply chain,” Fernandez said. “This includes the adoption and usage of global GS1 standards, allowing companies to tie their internal traceability processes to an external process which enables visibility up and down the supply chain.”

Companies are also generally taking steps to modernize business process, and are moving from paper-based record keeping to more electronic and automated processes.

“Today, it states that you must understand where your raw materials came from, from all of your suppliers, and you must be able to trace where all your finished products are going,” Moore said. “There’s no requirement about using technology, but it’s much simpler than the paper and pen method.”

LOOKING AHEAD

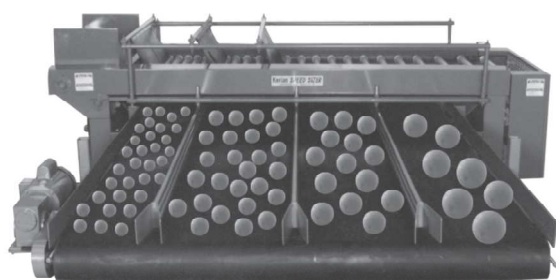
Fernandez sees traceability continuing to be a priority for produce industry supply chain partners, particularly as consumers remain concerned about food safety, sustainability, food origins and locally-grown produce.

“The greatest value of standardized data lies in trading partners’ ability to share supply chain visibility information and ‘see’ what’s happening along the supply chain,” she said. “GS1 standards enable supply chain visibility and will continue to be a cornerstone of food traceability programs for the foreseeable future.”

Myers said the future is more cloud technology for data capture, helping the industry to become more of a global traceability experience.

“Increased adoption makes the whole food supply chain safer,” he said. “By having this as a topic top-of-mind, it helps the organization’s longevity for survival and its profitability.” P

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