

Fresh Facts: Traceability

"Traceability is the ability to trace the history, application or location of that which is under consideration" (ISO 9001:2000) Whole-chain food traceability is comprised of both "tracking" and "tracing".

"Tracking" is the ability to follow the path of a traceable item through the supply chain as it moves between parties.

"Tracing" is the ability to identify the origin, attributes, or history of a particular traceable item located within the supply chain by reference to records held.

Why is it Important?

There are many drivers which underscore the importance of traceability in individual operations and throughout the supply chain, from grower/packer/shipper through to the retail or foodservice operation. Drivers include:

- **Compliance with regulatory or industry requirements.** In many countries the need to be able to trace product has been incorporated into government regulations. Typically this is a one-up/one-down requirement wherein each organization must be able to identify the immediate previous source and subsequent receiver of product. Industry requirements may not be as clearly defined but it is typical for retail and foodservice to have an expectation that, in the event of an incident, suppliers can execute a recall of their implicated product.
- **Limiting recall scope.** Traceability enables greater precision in the identification and withdrawal of product in the event of a recall or withdrawal of product thus reducing costs and demonstrating control of product.
- **Effective quality management.** The ability to identify sources of problems within a supply chain can greatly increase an organization's ability to address issues affecting product quality.
- **Food safety support.** It is important not to confuse the ability to trace product with ensuring food safety. Food safety programs can, however, be enhanced when sources of contamination, unsafe handling, etc. can be quickly and effectively identified and addressed.
- **Improved supply chain efficiencies and trading partner collaboration.** Processes introduced to enable traceability can additionally support improvements in the efficiency of how product, and the information associated with it, moves through the supply chain.

What You Need To Know

Traceability implementation across the supply chain is at varying degrees of implementation. Size of business, market demand, technology to implement (e.g. data capture via bar codes or RFID), and return on investment are all influencing factors. Confusion also exists relative to internal and external traceability. Internal traceability, traceability within an operation, is often very highly advanced, particularly within the supply side of the produce chain. External traceability, traceability between supply chain partners, is where traceability can diminish. What is crucial for efficient and effective traceability is improvement in the ability to track and trace product and information related to the product as it moves through the supply chain.

Two initiatives are focused on traceability solutions for the produce sector. At the global level, under the auspicious of the International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS) and GS1, industry experts and GS1 participants from around the globe collaborated on the creation of the [Traceability for Fresh Fruits & Vegetables Implementation Guide](#). The Guide is a practical document for all segments of the produce supply chain. [The Produce Traceability Initiative](#) (PTI) is an initiative of PMA, United Fresh and CPMA and is focused on full chain electronic traceability within the U.S. Both initiatives are based on GS1 supply chain standards already firmly incorporated in global supply chains. Please see links to both efforts in the resource list below.

CPMA Contact and Other Resources

For more information on this topic, please contact:

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Traceability Resources:

- [Traceability for Fresh Fruits & Vegetables Implementation Guide](#)
- [Produce Traceability Initiative](#) (PTI)