Addressing Food Traceability Legislation

With recent food traceability scares affecting thousands of U.S. food companies, food companies like Country Maid are faced with a choice as to how to address the traceability legislation, addressing everything from the incoming raw ingredients of product to their mixing, batching and blending process, through to the labeling of finished and repackaged goods.

This can be an expensive and brand damaging problem to address if companies take the traditional and inadequate “paper-trail” route.

Country Maids’ Management Team looked at traceability in a positive light, and the company’s President and CEO, Bill Carr, comments on his approach to the problem, “Food safety, product consistency and ingredient traceability is paramount to us and our customers. We are always exploring new techniques and systems available to ensure that not only are we leading the industry in this area but we are delivering the safest and most consistent products available.”

Country Maid decided to partner up with Dallas-based SG Systems LLC. The combination of experience from SG Systems combined with the drive and enthusiasm for production efficiency from Country Maid has produced a traceability system which complies with even the most stringent legislation while delivering an ROI through improved yield at the Quality Control Points such as recipe weighing and finished product portion control.

The ‘Vantage’ Solution

The Vantage Traceability Solution is a combination of hardware and software modules which integrate with the company's Accounts System (MAS90), providing seamless control to the production floor where ingredients are weighed (spices, sauces and vegetables), blended and then packaged into different container sizes before being shipped to customers with fully traceable batch numbers. It starts by a review of the production requirements which are entered onto the SG Systems management software.

This schedule provides the Vantage shop floor workstations with information relating to customer orders, delivery dates, items ordered and available inventory to "deduct" from. The work stations take the form of touch screen Vantage production line Terminals (Recipe Formulation, Mixer Collation and Finished Product Portion Control and Packaging Stations), barcode scanners, label printers and heavy duty platform scale.

When the line supervisors select the relevant production order from the Vantage touch screen display, it details how many batches of a particular product have been scheduled. Each formula is then weighed to a target weight (forcing the operator to weigh accurately and work to weight tolerances set by management). Only when the formula is exactly within the weighing tolerance will a label be printed to identify the batch as "ready for packaging." All ingredient lot codes are recorded at this point for full traceability.

Each finished product label is unique and fully traceable. The label displays information such as the Batch Number, Formula code and description, Expiration Date, Mix Size and JobNumber. A seach label is generated, the Vantage System is adding product to available finished inventory to enable the Management Team to have real time production in formation based on actual throughput with yield collected from the production floor.

The Tightest Possible Production Control & Traceability

Based on the Vantage traceability system, the reporting package has the ability to pinpoint which lot numbers have been delivered to which customers and when—all in real time. The package also enables visibility of operator performance, production throughput, and production yield while generating no additional workload for the site staff.

Bill Carr comments on the Vantage System, "To ensure the highest level of food safety and product quality for our customers, we needed a traceability system which collected its data from real events on the production floor. SG Systems have provided us with a product which we have taken from an initial discussion to a working solution within a rapid timeframe by using proven building blocks of traceability. Above all, the system is simple to use, easy to modify and generally popular with my team. The system provides traceability to comply with the most stringent food safety legislation and enables our process to score highly with the retailers requiring traceability."

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