# Getting on Track with Traceability

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With a growing focus on food safety, it is increasingly important for food manufacturers to be able to trace products effectively in the event of a recall. RedPrairie recently released a new survey uncovering traceability and recall trends and suggesting actions processors can take to stay on top of regulatory requirements.

**Q: What seemed to be the top concerns for executives regarding their companies' traceability practices?**

**A:** Although the breadth of concern regarding traceability was far-reaching, we found that almost 70 percent of executives surveyed were worried about coordinating recall issues with suppliers and distributors. Additionally, more than half of executives are concerned about their ability to isolate items within their own supply chain or execute a product recall within hours. These concerns are validated by the realities in which they currently operate. Most companies today do not have the ability to see real-time inventory positions nor have the ability to manage inventory across their extended supply chains.

**Q: Fifty-one percent of those surveyed indicated that issuing a recall would take them days or weeks, versus the 48.4 percent who said they could issue a recall within hours. What risks do companies face if they are not able to issue recalls promptly?**

**A:** When performing a recall, time is of the essence. Companies want to minimize their brand exposure by immediately stopping the sales of the tainted goods and recovering as much of the goods as possible from within their supply chain network. History will show that companies that are ineffective or slow to respond during recalls can suffer extreme financial cost and negative impact to their brand. Cost implications, the protection of the brand and protection of the consumer are foremost priorities for companies looking to implement traceability solutions.

**Q: Eleven percent of respondents said they were "uncertain" about or "not compliant" with existing traceability regulations, and another 6.3 percent said their companies are "partially compliant but not improving fast enough." Why are companies struggling to stay compliant?**

**A:** Regulations relative to compliance are constantly changing. The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is one example of that, and new regulations are in the pipeline. Companies already have so much on their plates with operating their businesses that it's often a challenge to have internal resources dedicated to not only keeping abreast of changing regulations, but also implementing new processes that meet those requirements. That's one reason why RedPrairie continues to innovate track-trace functionality with our Traceability Solution. We recognize it's our job to stay current on the latest regulations and bring the solutions to the marketplace to keep our customers compliant. Additionally, given the amount of data that is intrinsic to traceability enablement, RedPrairie is also able to host the customers' data if they are not interested in continually adding to their internal computing capacity.

**Q: Seventy-one percent of those surveyed said their traceability processes were partially automated. Should companies move toward fully automated traceability processes? Why or why not?**

**A:** Yes they should embrace the notion of automating their traceability processes. The main reasons relate to speed and accuracy. Fumbling through paperwork is not an optimal approach when you need the information immediately and you need to ensure you haven't missed anything. Today's technology allows for the real-time capture of granular Inventory Information and Order History. This is essential for any company striving for the ability to perform a "1-Touch Product Hold and Recall."

**Q: What are some ways for companies to improve their traceability processes?**

**A:** Implementing a solution that can track products on a very granular level is critical in improving traceability processes. You can tell how advanced an organization is in their traceability capabilities by how the recall is handled. Is the company recalling product of a specific lot code from a specific geographic region, etc? Or is the company bringing everything back, which is a very costly exercise. Companies that understand inventory genealogy have a true advantage in product recall scenarios. With today's technology and the ability to share inventory data frequently and in real time, there's no excuse as to why traceability shouldn't be more frequently adopted.

**Q: What factors might affect traceability requirements and developments in the future?**

**A:** There are a few more variations of Government Regulations and Industry Standards being discussed that can have an impact on future compliancy. The Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) is an example. I would add that tracking concepts such as Item-Level or Case-Level RFID tagging may emerge as a leading technology for optimally tracking inventory across the spans of an extended supply chain network.

***Interview by Lindsey Coblentz, Associate Editor,* Food Manufacturing**

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