Track more, worry less – Next level traceability for Australian berries

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Australia produces some of the most prized berry varieties in the world. Australian government and industry are placing significant importance on protecting the reputation and safety of our berries, and the farms that produce them. In January 2022, federal minister for agriculture, David Littleproud, announced funds of $68 million to support traceability of Australian products.

Why traceability?

Traceability is key to the unique tracking of products, from origin to destination, and the insights available at each stage of the journey.

So far, manual and paper-based processes such as spreadsheets, have been sufficient in tracking products to some degree. However, today's consumers, regulators, retailers and food safety schemes require more granular, precise and timely information from the berry supply chain, especially when it comes to exports and time-critical incidents such as product recalls.

GS1 barcodes are the foundation for traceability. They are used on products worldwide, delivering a unique number specific to each product that can be read and understood by any system or organisation across the globe. This means berry producers are better able to meet export market regulations and achieve greater brand protection.

Not all barcodes are equal

"I have a barcode on my punnets, so I'm good to go, right?"

Not necessarily.

Back in the 1990's, an agreement was struck between retailers, grower organisations and GS1. Retailers wanted barcodes to scan at point-of-sale, but growers didn't want to pay for or manage their own numbers. Retailers agreed that they did not need the granularity of numbers by grower and the state-based grower associations agreed to play a role.

For the past 25 years, growers have been able to access barcode numbers from their grower association and a 250g punnet of strawberries from Queensland has carried the same number on it no matter which farm it has come from, unless the grower elected to obtain their own number.

The problem is, to the retailer they are all the same. Their systems simply record the sale of a 250g strawberry punnet from Queensland. This doesn't allow for differentiation in any way. If there is a premium crop from one area or a single grower, they all get lumped in with the others. If there is contamination in one field, they all get tarred with the same brush. A recall is carried out on every item that bears that number – across the whole State.

Today, consumers and retailers expect more information and better visibility of what they are buying and selling. The time has come for individual identification (barcodes) at the grower level.

Next level traceability for brand protection

Barcodes allocated by GS1 are only the beginning of an enhanced traceability system. Once these are in place, a software solution is required for scanning and automating the delivery of information, as products flow throughout the supply chain.

As the Department of Agriculture mentions in the National Traceability Framework, 'Evolving and emerging technologies may provide new solutions for tracing agricultural products and food through the supply chain. They have the potential to reduce the cost of tracing, and provide accurate, accessible and timely information and identification of goods.'

When choosing a traceability software solution for your business, it's important to ensure the system is capable of using GS1 standards. Some of the questions to ask a solution provider are:

- Does the solution use barcodes for product identification?

- Does the solution have the capability to maintain barcodes along with the ability to encode other data such as serial numbers and best-before dates?

- Does the solution support the allocation and application of unique barcodes for all levels of packaging hierarchy for a product?

Generic (non-standards based) questions to consider		
Cultivar	**Description**	**Questions to Consider Asking**
Solution Maturity	Knowing how long a solution has been in market helps define risk.	• How long has the solution provider been in business? • How long has the traceability solution been in the market? • What is your current presence in this country?
Technical Support	Understanding how support is provided is usually important.	• Is the solution cloud based or desktop based? • In which country is the cloud-based service or solution housed? • If I needed support, how would this be delivered?
References and Case Studies	Obtaining references may assist to qualify capabilities and value.	• Do you have case studies demonstrating business benefits and value proposition of your solution? • Is there a reference site/implementation that we can contact?
Fitness for Purpose	It may be helpful to know if the solution is generic, customisable or industry specific.	• What is the cost of the solution and are there ongoing subscriptions fees charges? • Who owns the data and how is data privacy managed?
Value for money	Setting expectations re cost and understanding investment return.	• What is the cost of the solution and are there ongoing subscriptions fees charges? • Who owns the data and how is data privacy managed?
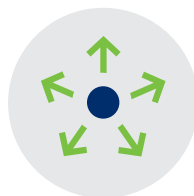
IDENTIFY   **CAPTURE**   **SHARE**   **USE**

For more information about enhanced traceability visit the GS1 Australia website or scan the QR code.