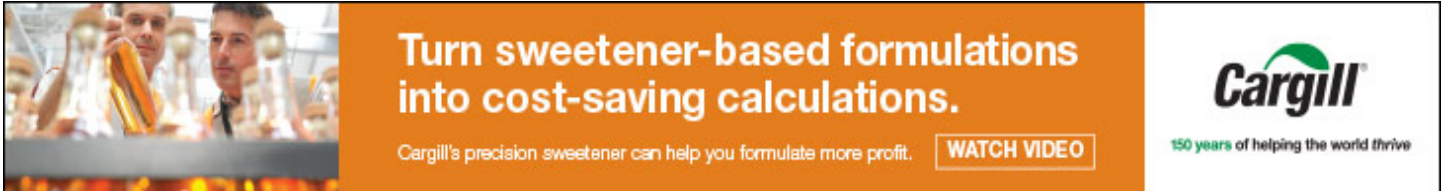


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Track and Trace Technology: One Cure For the Common Recall

 Fri, 06/12/2015 - 1:00pm

 by Jack Payne

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Twenty-one lives were lost and more than 100 people were infected in 1998 by a deadly outbreak of food poisoning linked to meat products from a [Sara Lee plant](#). The leading supplier of meat and bakery solutions was forced to remove approximately 35 million pounds of deli meat from grocery shelves across the country. This was financially costly to the company – Sara Lee lost \$100 million dollars due to the recall – and it also severely tarnished the brand's reputation.

Nearly two decades later, it seems that many companies still haven't learned from Sara Lee's mistake. According to [Food Navigator](#), and consulting firm [Stericycle ExpertRECALL](#), food recalls in the U.S. hit a two year high in 2013. Or in more specific terms, the U.S. averages six food recalls a day, impacting roughly 18.4 million products. Just last month, Blue Bell Creameries recalled its products and stopped production after several illnesses and deaths were linked to listeria found in the company's ice cream. Beyond listeria, salmonella, and E. coli outbreaks, companies like Kraft have had to issue recalls following consumer reports of plastic or metal surfacing in its products.

For the most part companies are stepping up and taking accountability when contamination strikes, but the food and beverage manufacturing industry has much more work to do to prevent the endangerment of lives. The operative word here is "prevent." Mass recalls are can be prevented. Manufacturers can become more proactive in mitigating the risk and impact of contamination if leveraging technology correctly.



Reduce the Risk

When appropriately used, track and trace technology significantly reduces the risk of a recall. Or, in other words, the technology is a far less costly measure to preventing tragedy.

Track and trace technology documents all of a product's details in its lifecycle from ingredients to end-user delivery. In addition, track and trace solutions can include built-in controls to provide manufacturers with visibility into qualified suppliers and the ability to specify incoming inspection requirements. Warning and out of tolerance limits can also ensure critical control points within an HACCP plan are measured. If a tolerance issue or contamination is identified, the track and trace solution can notify the manufacturer in real-time to begin addressing the problem and avert the defected product from leaving the production floor.

Preparation, a Brand's Best Line of Defense

It only takes one bad ingredient to force a food and beverage manufacturer into issuing a recall. Tracing that ingredient fast is the key to minimizing consumer risk and protecting a company's reputation. Without an effective track and trace process, you could very well be the next brand making headlines for inadvertently causing consumers harm.

With track and trace technology in particular, food and beverage manufacturers gain greater visibility into the production process. Most offer real-time access to data and analytics about a product at any point throughout its production and distribution. This means that within a matter of seconds, manufacturers can be prepared to answer the following critical questions:

- Where are my products located?
- Where, when, and in what quantities were my products produced?
- Which ingredients and processes were used to make these products?
- What quality assurance data is available for each of my products?
- Where, when, and in what quantities were the products shipped to/from?
- Who supplied the raw ingredients and when?
- Were the raw ingredients used in any other products?

The more details a food and beverage manufacturer has the better. In the event of a recall or near miss, when credibility and time are both of the essence, manufacturers can be primed to respond to inquiries accurately and immediately take action.

Keep Compliant

Looking for another reason why you should look into how track and trace technology is being used at your company? Search no further than the FDA’s [Food Safety Modernization Act](#) (FSMA). Signed into law this past January, the entire purpose of the FSMA is to drive manufacturers to proactively prevent food safety problems instead of reacting to outbreaks.

Although the law is in its infancy, the FDA is cracking down on food and beverage manufacturers and working to mandate comprehensive, science-based preventive controls across the food supply. This is where track and trace technology can help. Advanced solutions can streamline compliance reporting and provide an easy tool to initiate mock recalls – remember, preparation is key.

The Bottom Line

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), approximately one in six Americans fall ill, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die each year because of foodborne diseases. Properly using technology is the simple solution to eradicate this epidemic. Sophisticated, yet intuitive, track and trace solutions can help brands ensure product safety, secure customer trust, and meet industry and government regulatory compliance regulations. Food and beverage manufacturers have nothing to lose and everything to gain from exploring its use of this type of tool.

Think about it. Would you rather your company be recognized as a trusted change agent in the food and beverage industry, or would you rather it be known as another irresponsible company that disregards consumer safety?

Jack Payne, Vice President of Solution Consulting at [Aptean](#).

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