Q&A: Product Traceability and the Wolverine Packing Beef Recall

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Interview with Keri Dawson, vice president, Industry Solutions and Advisory Services, MetricStream

***Food Manufacturing* spoke with Dawson on the implications of the current** 2 million pound beef recall **[1] from Wolverine Packing Company. What happens now that contaminated beef has entered the global supply chain and how could traceability have prevented the E.coli scare?**

Q: How could a traceability program have stemmed or stopped problems surrounding from this recall (beef recall)?

A: Recent incidents of recalls have re-affirmed the need to trace food consistently and efficiently from the point of origin to the point of consumption. Traceability plays a major role in protecting consumer loyalty, managing reputational risks and ensuring overall food safety. Food traceability programs allow companies and regulatory authorities to identify the source of a problem, and initiate the appropriate procedures to remedy it immediately. An integrated framework to store and manage supplier, importer, distributor, and retailer information, Certificate of

Analyses from every supplier, along with shipment details can help organizations manage recalls, prevent reputational damage, and potentially save millions of dollars in the recall process. The role of traceability programs is not just restricted to recalls, however. Traceability programs can also help enhance overall transparency, as well as help facilitate the proactive and early identification of potential risks throughout the food chain.

Q: What are the challenges typically faced by a company in a recall situation and how are they best faced?

A: Major challenges faced by a company in a recall situation include accurately identifying the source of the food safety issue, and communicating quickly and effectively with consumers, suppliers, distributors and retailers. A well-defined traceability program can help organizations to more quickly identify the source of the issue. Once identified, organizations should utilize the proper and most effective communication channels to notify all stakeholders, including manufacturers, distributors, stores, importers, and sellers of the product to immediately cease any further distribution. Perhaps the most daunting task of all for organizations is in communicating with consumers directly. It is oftentimes difficult for organizations to know who exactly their individual customers are, and how to best reach them. This problem can be solved by tapping into the insights generated from loyalty and reward schemes that track customer purchases, through which customers provide their contact information, including their phone number and/or email address. This contact information can be very useful when communicating directly with customers who have purchased the product in question. Along with providing up-to-date information on the company's website, organizations should also look to social media channels to help disseminate the appropriate recall information.

Q: Are there any changes in FSMA that, once enacted, will change the food recall procedure?

A: FSMA focuses on prevention. Recalls are no longer only voluntary, and the FSMA has granted the FDA with mandatory recall authority. Under the preventive controls section of FSMA, a written recall plan is now a mandate, and the FSMA provides guidance on what exactly should be in that plan. However, just having a recall plan is not enough; facilities need to have a process for conducting effectiveness checks to ensure that the recall is being carried out appropriately. The rule also requires that facilities have some method of notifying the direct recipients of the product recalled, and the public at large. Preventive controls rules also require facilities to have written procedures regarding a recalled product's disposition – including how the product is going to be reconditioned or destroyed in a safe manner.

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