

Part 5 – Traceback

Traceback is the ability to track food items, including fresh produce, back to their original source. This cannot prevent an initial food borne outbreak, but it may help speed up the process to pinpoint the source. The faster the source is located the faster the rest of the produce industry can get back to normal. Hopefully, this will help ensure that the public will have greater confidence in the produce industry.

A written procedure must be included in the Grower Food Safety Manual on how the farm will track individual containers back to the original source. Maintain as many detailed records as possible including the harvesting dates, specific field and product location within the field or orchard, number of packages within a lot, packing and shipping date and harvesting crew. Each container must contain some type of identification to maintain its integrity throughout the harvesting and marketing process. The label on the box generally is sufficient to trace the product to the farm or packing house, but each wholesale box must have a date stamped or code with the date incorporated on the box. Placing a label on the wrapped pallet will not meet this standard. If packing in more than one shed or packing under someone else's label, additional identification is needed to trace the product back to the packinghouse. A hand-labeling gun can be used to code each box where a series of numbers can identify the container. For example – 1-675625 0

1 = (date harvested) this could be the first day a grower picked or the Julian calendar date such as 167 for June 14 or use the calendar date 613. This reserves the first 3 digits numbers for dates.

5 = (grower)

6 = (field picked or picker)

2 = (packing date)

The other numbers can be used for more information or be zeros. At the end of each packing day record the beginning and ending numbers in a book. The code for these

numbers needs to be recorded once and filed. The code is to assist the grower if there is a question about a shipment.

Recall procedures must be included in the Grower Food Safety Manual. Mock recalls should be scheduled at least every six months to ensure the system works properly. The farm must document the customers contacted, the amount of product remaining from the original shipment and the disposition of product which could not effectively be recalled. This may include sales to customers or reshipment to other customers who could be contacted if necessary. Auditors will review the traceback procedures and reports from the mock recall. **Note this does not mean you take control of the product. The auditors want to see if you have the ability to take control if a recall is requested!**