

Traceability for New England Growers

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Traceability is simply a way to identify produce from the field to the first point of sale. For large shipper packers that work with many farms, this can become quite complicated. For most of us in New England, however, it is simple.

If a grower is selling produce from their own farm, there are four main parts to consider:

1. Have a map of the farm showing fields and crop locations. This can be drawn or a “Google” map can be used. The current Google maps for much of New England were taken in June of 2010 and show fields already planted which makes this process very simple. In addition to indicating a crop on the map, mark the starting and stopping date for harvest of each field.
2. Keep all sales receipts. They indicate the crop, date, and who it was sold to. For retail sales right at the farm, there is nothing further to do.
3. Each box that is sold off the farm through wholesale channels should have the name and location of the farm as well as a date stamp. The farm name and location can be printed on the box or it can be added with a sticker. The date stamp could be the actual date or it could be Julian date (Jan 1 is 1 while December 31 is 365). These can be hand written, printed on stickers, or placed on a box using a hand held labeling “gun”. DayMark Safety Solutions is one company that has these products available which makes it very easy to apply stickers to hundreds of boxes an hour. Even if a gun is not purchased, it is helpful to purchase stickers and ink that will work on waxed cartons and can take getting wet.
4. A mock recall must be performed each year. This involves calling a customer that you have shipped product to, asking them to verify if they have your product on hand, and if they can identify a certain date or lot number in question. In a real food safety situation, this customer could retrieve the boxes in question so that they could be returned, destroyed, or tested. Product may no longer be in their possession but the Gap requirements require “one step backwards” and “one step forward”. One step forward may be another farm, an individual supermarket store, or a chain warehouse. There is no requirement that the product be traced to an individual consumer. Also, this mock recall must be verified preferably with a letter or email from the person that you called and the details of what you were asking for.

On a single farm, it is possible that product on a given day may come from more than one field and different water supplies, workers, livestock proximities, etc. may be involved. If it is not possible to separate the product, then state in your farm plan that product from different fields on the farm are comingled as a standard practice and indicate those fields and harvest dates on the farm map. For example, successive plantings of zucchini are often planted on a farm. Indicate on the farm map the different plantings as well as the first day and last day of harvest from each field. On days in which the map indicates that multiple fields are harvested on the same date, the farm plan can state that product is comingled when harvest dates overlap. Of course, a grower can choose to keep product separate and record this information on the box label or date stamp as well as on a form kept in the farm plan.

For growers who purchase product from other farms, it is helpful to pack this product separately so that “one step back” can be one farm or field. If separation of product from two or more locations is not possible, then indicate the sources of the product and state that the product was comingled. This usually adds one more step to the above process since the sales receipt alone is not enough to indicate the origin of the product.

Following is a sample traceability procedure that may be contained in a farm plan:

Part 5.) Traceback Procedures

The Henderson Farm utilizes an efficient tracking system to track food items back to the source (our farm). Part of this is recording harvest dates, specific field and product locations, number of packages, packing and shipping dates, and the harvesting crew. Each of our containers uses a label on the box to help identify it. Each wholesale box is also stamped with the date and code. We also go over recall

procedures and conduct a mock recall every six months. During this mock recall, we document everything including customer contacts.

Following is a sample hand drawn farm map as well as a Google map, either of which could be used in a farm plan.

