

Lowry Launches New RFID-Based Solution to Track Food Shipments from Farm to Plate

Amidst Calls for Better Food Safety, Broader Use of Auto ID Technologies Can Provide the Answer

SCDigest Editorial Staff

2008 will go down as a critical year in the quest for better food safety, as a number of high profile recalls and incidents caught the public attention in a big way.

Those include the "salsa" issue that was originally blamed on bad tomatoes, leading to the recall of huge volumes of fresh tomatoes, only to have the US FDA later clear tomatoes as a source of the salmonella outbreak and subsequently cite bad jalapeno peppers as the likely culprit - but not for sure.

A short while later, China and parts of the rest of the world were in turmoil over tainted milk products that led to a number of deaths and sickened thousands more.

Clearly, the food safety system in the US and around the globe has room for significant improvement. What's been frustrating for many supply chain professionals and technology vendors is that the tools to make significant progress in food traceability, which in turn could enable a much faster and more focused response to any food safety incidents, have been available for some time, yet little adopted.

These tools include the basics of automatic identification, such as bar coding and now RFID, data collection networks, and the Internet. Many existing tracking applications based on these tools could relatively easily be enhanced to support the food supply chain, but there has been relatively little development of software specifically for the food supply chain thus far. This is due both to the lack of market demand thus far and probably also the fact that in

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most cases track and trace capabilities in the food supply chain would require the cooperation of several trading partners, complicating the issue.

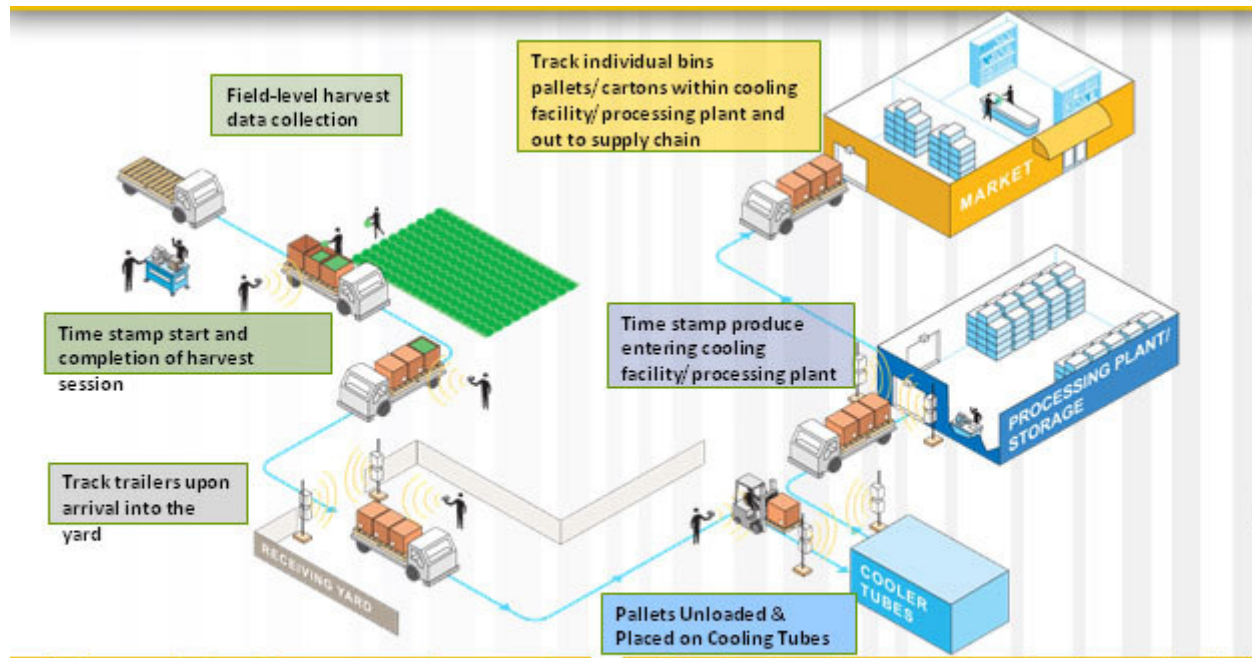
Lowry Releases New Solution

Still, it was interesting to see Lowry Computer Products, an AIDC-based systems integrator, release a new software application that specifically addresses food industry track and trace.

According to **Jeff Tazelaar**, a product manager at Lowry, its Secure Visibility solution, which is comprised of several data collection and inventory control modules, has the ability to track food products "from farm to plate."

Tazelaar described the solution, which it has implemented at an un-named food manufacturer, on a

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Lowry's Secure Visibility Solution Uses RFID to Track Food Movement Through the Supply Chain

recent Supply Chain Videocast from SCDigest. That broadcast is now available for on-demand viewing: [Increasing Effectiveness in the Supply Chain using RFID Technologies](#).

The solution will be most efficient using RFID, said Tazelaar, but can alternatively use bar codes, and does link RFID data to UCC-128 bar code shipping labels.

Mobile computer terminals literally "in the field" can start the tracking process as fruits or vegetables, for example, are picked and originally packed. In the initial implementation, new port-

able RFID printers (from Zebra Technologies) print and encode RFID tags that are placed on produce containers, which are then read by the mobile readers to start the tracking process. That tracking continues as the product is moved from the field to distribution to a downstream user of the product, such as a food producer, wholesaler or restaurant chain.

"This is an area like health care, where AIDC-based tools to better track the drugs given to patients has been there for years and could save thousands of lives, but has still seen relatively little adoption," said SCDigest editor Dan Gilmore. "It's much the same with food safety, though we did need some additional software support, which this application seems to provide."