
A Revolution in Traceability

10/03/2004 -- A new IT system pioneered in the States will give food manufacturers enhanced traceability, food quality, security and efficiency, according to developer Arrowsight. FoodProductionDaily.com talked to company CEO Adam Aronson to find out how the system works and why the food processing industry should sit up and take notice.

The system, called **ADT Select Vision powered by Arrowsight**, involves situating video cameras at critical areas of production. The video is then reviewed and audited by Arrowsight at a remote location and a statistical report compiled. *"What we've done is create a technical platform that can go into any environment, including food,"* CEO Adam Aronson told FoodProductionDaily.com.

Aronson believes that the technology, which is only a few years old, addresses the major food production issues of today: traceability, food quality, security and efficiency. *"After all, no matter how good an idea is, it has to make money,"* he said.

Issues of food safety are especially pertinent in meat processing, a sector that Aronson believes good benefit enormously from the system. *"If you run a meat plant, then show us the critical points of your operation and we'll send you a report,"* he said. *"This report shows you how your plant performs in each critical area, giving you statistics. For example, your meat preparation sector might have a productivity rate of 71 per cent, or 50 per cent. You can immediately tell how your plant performs in each key area."*

Consequently, a production manager can look at the report and identify a sector that is under-performing. The operation manager then immediately knows what specific areas to focus on. *"And this trickles right down to the people on the line, as the statistics are very transparent,"* he said. *"They can change every week so the managers can tell if things are improving."*

Food quality is another pertinent issue. *"If you operate a sausage factory, you'll know that there are scheduled times that have to put the meat in,"* said

Aronson. *"In the US at least, we have what is called a first blend, when the leader meat is put in, then a fattier meat, then a bag of spice. It is vital that these go in a strict order. This is a safety issue, an efficiency issue and a waste reduction issue all in one."*

Aronson claimed that major meat companies are beginning to see other advantages in adopting this technology. Extra security measures in the production process are of great interest, as more and more retailers are demanding greater traceability throughout the food chain.

"If a manufacturer can send retailers a third party report, then it provides an extra check and balance. We have noticed that many of the world's top retailers are now happy to move revenue to companies that do this sort of thing. Now this is an incredibly interesting dynamic - manufacturers are investing in this technology because they believe that they will get a return on their investment."

Aronson also believes that the cost of the system is far from prohibitive. *"Every food processing plant is different,"* he said. *"But say you operate a meat processing plant that sells \$100 million of meat a year. I would say that this technology will cost you \$250,000; in other words, a quarter of a penny for every pound of meat sold, if meat costs one dollar a pound. The technology will not cost even one hundredth of overall revenue, but the benefits could be huge."*

In the end, greater traceability in the food supply chain is inevitable. Manufacturers in the EU are preparing for forthcoming legislation on food traceability in January 2005. The new legislation means that food traceability through the supply chain is going to become a legal responsibility.

Under the new laws, food producers must be able to identify products by batch, lot or consignment numbers and traceability of the product must be possible at all stages of production, processing and distribution. This means food businesses will have to be able to identify every supplier of food, feed, a food producing animal or any substance incorporated into their food/feed products.

"Suppliers need to do this," said Aronson. *"But as we can show, it's not that hard to implement."*