

Körper Supply Chain

Voice-enabling the produce traceability initiative



As the general population becomes more informed about the food they are eating, consumers and federal regulators require a heightened amount of information on the path the food follows from growth to consumption. This trend has created a need for an industry-wide commitment to provide this information, which is exactly what the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) aims to do. The process of converting your business to the initiative can be strenuous, but with the help of voice, your organization can join the movement, while enjoying the many other benefits that come with voice.

What is the produce traceability initiative?

The Produce Traceability Initiative, an initiative sponsored by the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, GS1 US, Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh Produce Association, is aiming to increase the traceability of produce as it makes its way from the ground to the store shelves.

“It’s designed to help the industry maximize the effectiveness of current produce trace-back procedures, while developing a standardized industry approach to enhance the speed and efficiency of traceability systems for the future.”

– Official PTI Website

A group of 50 produce retailers, wholesalers, distributors, packer-shippers and growers with the goal of achieving whole-chain traceability spearheaded the initiative.

The PTI is built on the GSI Global Traceability Standard, which defines a broad traceability standard that can be applied to a wide range of industries. The goal is for all participants in the North American produce supply chain to achieve case-level tracking by lot number for all produce, from supplier to store. Although there is no authority to regulate or require companies to meet its requirements, the PTI is an industry initiative that has gained widespread support from those who see the value in what it offers.

Why would I participate?

Making your operation PTI compliant comes with a host of benefits that can save you time, money, and potentially a public relations nightmare. The PTI is meant to build on the current capabilities of companies, enhancing their initiatives with common frameworks across all companies to provide a streamlined view throughout the supply chain. This means you won't need to overhaul any current, internal traceability initiatives, only enhance them. This is done by including a Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) and lot number, aligning the "language" of every company using the PTI. This information is stored electronically throughout the entire supply chain, permitting industry wide searching and analysis to get answers more quickly.

Once those standards are in place, the benefits can take immediate effect. In the event of an FDA or Health Canada investigation in a foodborne illness outbreak, many companies will struggle to prove that their produce was not contaminated or involved in any contaminated shipments. With the PTI, you can easily identify those products that may be at risk, and which are not, keeping the maximum amount of product on the market. This saves you product and money, and helps investigations conclude more rapidly, getting your business back to normal.

Not only does this help the bottom line and speed up investigations, but this also helps the industry as a whole. Consumers won't need to be concerned about the safety of the produce on the shelves, so there will no longer be a crisis anytime a specific produce item is feared to be contaminated.



How do I implement?

The PTI has developed an implementation plan for companies looking to join the initiative, complete with recommendations and best practices that can be combined with existing standards. To achieve case level produce traceability, the PTO uses three identifiers defined by the Global Traceability Standard:

SSCC: The SSCC (Serial Shipping Container Code) uniquely identifies a pallet of produce. The SSCC includes a seven-digit company identifier and a nine-digit “serial reference” (pallet serial number). Pallet serial numbers last only for the life of the pallet, which means they can be reused.

GTIN: The GTIN (Global Trade Item Number) identifies a specific SKU. Various formats are acceptable, but the PTI format includes a seven-digit company identifier and a six-digit item identifier (SKU number).

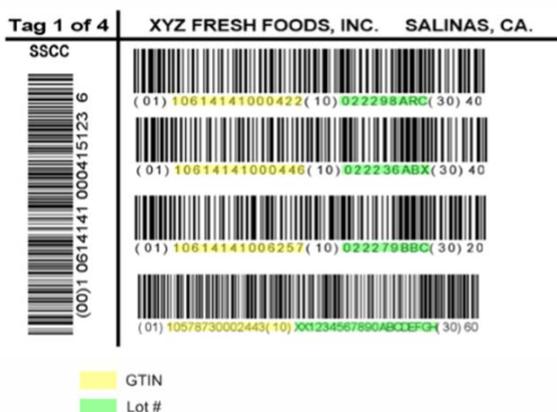
Lot/Batch #: The lot/batch number is a five-digit identifier. As with the pallet serial number, lot/batch numbers exist only for the life of a lot, allowing them to be reused.

For pallet labeling, the PTI recommends for the long term using only the SSCC on the pallet, with an ASN tying the SSCC to information about the content of the pallet.

For case labeling, the PTI recommends a label containing the GTIN and lot number, as shown in the following example.



Note that the PTI recommendations for case (not pallet) labels require the inclusion of the GTIN and the lot number in human-readable form, with a minimum font size of 18 points. This recommendation ensures that in the event of a product recall, personnel at all points in the supply chain will be able to readily identify an item and its lot number without requiring equipment such as a bar code reader.

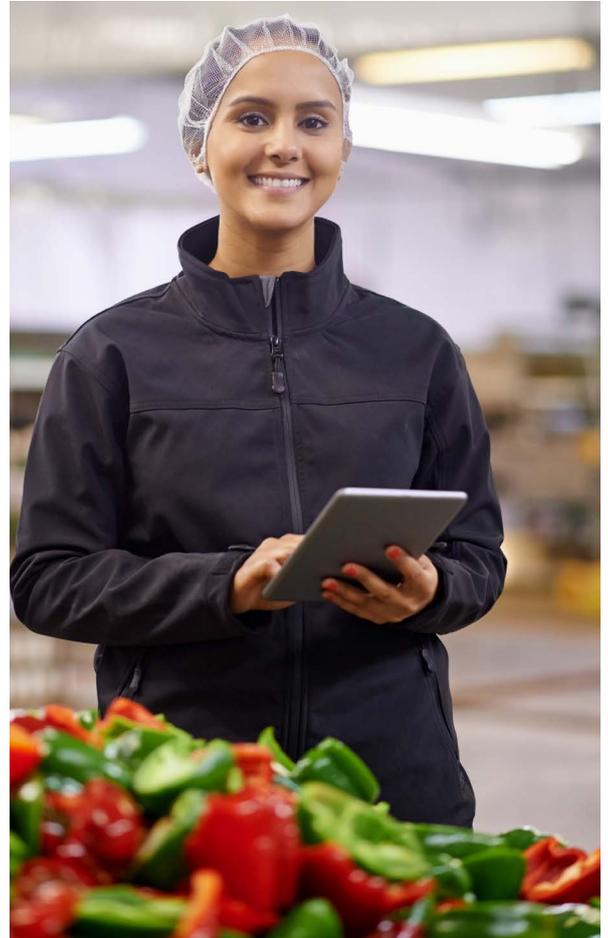


Voice and the PTI

Voice has long been used to support the PTI, and there is a voice pick code developed specifically for use with the PTI. Developed by HarvestMark, the PTI voice pick code has patent protection, but is available to all members of the produce supply chain on an entirely royalty-free basis. The PTI voice pick code is fully described in the Harvestmark whitepaper¹, which can be found in the references at the bottom of this page.

To be put simply, the code condenses the GTI, lot number, and date code (if available) to make a four-digit “hash code”. This code condenses a large amount of information into a much smaller “digest”, allowing it to be easily communicated with voice. In the event of a recall, all you would have to do is determine which pallet(s) contain the affected lot(s), and recall all cases with voice pick code(s) corresponding to the affected lot(s). As long as your warehouse management system (WMS) is set-up to track pallets within the warehouse, allowing you to know which store shipments contain product from any pallet, you can utilize voice to enhance the PTI.

The PTI-endorsed format for displaying the voice pick code on case labels is shown in the following example. The digits shown in the bottom right-hand corner of the label are the voice pick code, with the two least significant digits in the substantially larger font.



¹https://www.harvestmark.com/media/314370/hm_whitepaper_voicecode_v1b.pdf

Why should I use voice?

Utilizing voice with the PTI allows your warehouse to take advantage of all of the benefits associated with voice, while further optimizing your operation around the PTI. Rather than having to refer to a piece of paper or screen on a scanner for directions, the voice software interprets directions from your WMS, and speaks them through a voice-enabled headset to your workers. Your workers then respond with check digits, like the ones shown above, which are sent back to the WMS to verify the task has been completed. This information is live updated in your system, ensuring that your inventory and order information is up to date at all times. In the case of the PTI, where nearly every product will have a check digit associated with it, this can save a lot of time scanning or writing, and will make your workers more productive, accurate, and safe.

Productivity

The “Hands-free, Eyes-free” voice technology allows your workers to move around the warehouse, unencumbered by having to hold a scanner or piece of paper. Workers are able to simultaneously hear and respond to directions as they move through the warehouse, making their processes more efficient.

Accuracy

The voice system is set up to work with a series of check digits, which is a major reason why it is such a seamless fit for the PTI. These check digits are required by the voice system, and workers cannot continue on with a task without verifying that the check digits are correct. This increases the likelihood that the worker is in the right location, picking the right product and the right quantity. Many operations find that after implementing voice, their productivity increases up to 85%.

Safety

Many processes in the warehouse require two hands to complete safely, but they are often completed with a scanner or clipboard in hand. This puts the product at risk of being dropped or mishandled (which, when dealing with produce, leads to bruised or otherwise damaged product that can no longer be sold), but it also increases the likelihood of worker injury. Voice allows your workers to stay focused on the task, and frees their hands up to safely lift product.

Conclusion

As the PTI becomes more common, many companies are looking for a way to make it more efficient. By voice-enabling the PTI, you can realize the benefits of the initiative, while improving your warehouse operations as a whole.

Discover more

Could Körber's versatile voice solutions be the right fit for your operation?

Contact us to find out: <https://www.koerber-supplychain.com/supply-chain-solutions/supply-chain-voice-solutions>

