

BUILDING TRACEABILITY PARTNERSHIPS

Engaging trading partners for end-to-end traceability implementation

Robust traceability depends on data capture and sharing across an entire supply chain, from ocean to plate. Implementing traceability systems as part of a precompetitive group of trading partners will help to ensure technological interoperability, improving data sharing and reliability across the supply chain.

The following insights, based on interviews with seafood professionals who have implemented traceability systems, serve as a guide for seafood companies looking to engage their trading partners to adopt effective, reliable, full-chain traceability solution.

MARKET THE BENEFITS OF TRACEABILITY, NOT TRACEABILITY ITSELF

Engage and retain partners by highlighting the benefits of implementing traceability systems, rather than trying to market the system itself.

“Part of [implementing traceability system] was to gain new customers that care about traceability; we also have fairly stable customer base, so about adding value to them. Thirdly, it was about separating ourselves from everyone else.” —Seafood Company Representative

Anecdotal evidence suggests that electronic traceability can decrease operating costs, establish a competitive advantage, download supply chain information, and/or improve buyer confidence.

IDENTIFY SPECIFIC DRIVERS FOR SPECIFIC ACTORS

Demonstrate to partners how and where traceability has the potential to improve product quality and market access while decreasing costs. Specific benefits will depend on the product type, product form, and the position in the supply chain, but some of the potential improvements from electronic traceability adoption include:

- Reduced food safety risks, [improved recall](#) [procedure efficacy](#) and regulatory compliance
- Improved ability to identify and address potential risks in the supply chain
- The opportunity to gain a competitive market advantage due to higher quality products
- Increased operational efficiencies due to improvements in demand forecasting, real-time product tracking, and improved inventory management
- Value-added benefits (e.g. increased end-consumer information)

ANCHOR INITIATIVES AROUND KEY VISIONARIES

Successful partnerships are those where key business partners have aligned values and a willingness to invest based on a shared vision of agile and robust systems. Strong partnerships can help:

- Promote technological innovations
- Enhance partner’s capacity to respond to evolving market demands
- Design, implement, and improve traceability tools that meet the particular needs of the partnership

Traceability benefits can be difficult to articulate, and effective ventures depend on strong and coordinated leadership capable of envisioning and communicating the advantages of new systems

UNDERSTAND THE INFRASTRUCTURE

Trading partners should collaboratively determine potential limitations such as environmental conditions and local capacity, while allowing sufficient time for the gradual adoption and implementation of new practices and standards. Some factors to consider include:

- Extreme humidity, heat, or freezing conditions
- Access to and reliability of wireless and other communication systems
- Legacy systems or policies
- Ability to train existing staff on new technology systems
- Language barriers
- Cultural norms, such as familiarity with technology or expectations regarding gender roles

Effective traceability systems are financially, socially, and geographically tailored to fit the needs of all those involved.

DETERMINE A TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

Develop a supply chain-wide technology system that supports multiple levels of decision making and provides a clear view of product flow, services, and information to all partners. In addition, a robust technology strategy needs to be:

- Flexible and adaptable to accommodate the still-changing standards and products landscape
- Interoperable, to support efficient, accurate data sharing
- Verifiable, via data checks across multiple systems, or third party audits
- Secure, offering assurance of confidentiality of proprietary information

End-to-end traceability technology depends on detailed planning to set permission-based access and ensure all parties understand and agree to data sharing policies and procedures.

ELUCIDATE AND DOCUMENT INTENT AND GOALS

Traceability implementation can result in different benefits for different supply chain actors, depending on current status of internal systems, position in the supply chain, types of product traded, and other factors. Early on in the process, trading partners benefit from clear identification of specific expectations and goals of engaging in traceability implementation.

Examples of expectations and goals include:

- Access to new markets or customers
- Increased operational efficiencies
- Verification of product legality or origin
- Price premiums

BUILD IN ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Adopt supply chain performance measures to gauge collective success in reaching the individual goals of each trading partner, as well as shared goals for the supply chain. Also include means for all partners to be able to evaluate how each organization is fulfilling their stated commitments to the project.

Some examples include:

- Service agreements & reporting requirements
- Data sharing agreements/ electronic data interchange agreements
- Audits & regular convenings
- Mapping critical tracking events as a way to assign individual responsibilities

Implementing traceability systems is complex and all actors in the supply chain must be held accountable for the system to work.

For those interested in moving forward, please see [Taking the First Steps](#) resource, which provides information on how to assess internal and external traceability capacity and the RFP tool, which can support a collaborative technology vendor solution search.