



## 'Best step' taken to safer food

Food chain participants for VeriPrime to assure consumers of safe food that's traceable to farms and fields of origin.

By ROD SMITH

**A**CROSS an increasingly complex food chain, grain and livestock and poultry producers are increasingly adopting practices and participating in systems that increase their accountability to consumers, and members of VeriPrime are making themselves accountable for food safety "from farm to fork," according to Drs. Scott Crain and Dave Farnum.

VeriPrime establishes food safety protocols and issues a seal that assures consumers of the safety of the meat and poultry they buy in restaurants and supermarkets and of the traceability of those products back to farms of origin. It also can track feed to corn and soybean farms.

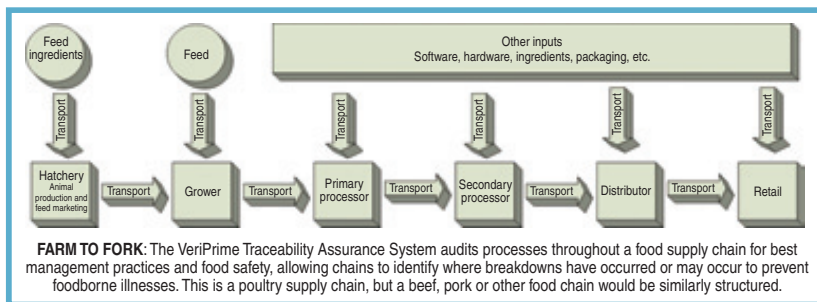
Crain and Farnum founded and started working to perfect VeriPrime six years ago and launched it earlier this year after the U.S. Department of

Agriculture approved Agri Food Certification as the certifying entity for the system. In an interview with *Feedstuffs FoodLink*, they discussed how the system works.

### Audits, certification

First, VeriPrime actually is a member-owned cooperative with basically three membership types: (1) producers — beef, pork, poultry, grain, fruit and vegetable, (2) packers/processors, distributors and others who convert producer products to consumer products and deliver them and (3) retailers in the restaurant (fine dining to quick service) and supermarket trades.

VeriPrime has at least some membership in all of those areas, but its largest membership is feedlot production, where it covers 60% of the fed cattle supply, according to Crain. He said he and Farnum are actively engaged in expanding VeriPrime's mem-



bership.

More information is available at [www.veriprime.org](http://www.veriprime.org) under the "Food Chain" tab.

Second, each membership section establishes food safety protocols using the best management practices and science available and signs up to be part of the VeriPrime Traceability Assurance System (VTAS). VeriPrime then tracks the movement of grain, feed, animals and food to consumer points.

VTAS is technology neutral, which means producers can use any identification technology from ear tags to electronic, Farnum (pictured) said.



The flow chart demonstrates how VTAS works, using chicken production as an example, but the "hatchery" box could be a breeding or multiplier herd, feedlot or other points of origin.

VTAS audits the food safety standards and quality management followed in a particular supply chain to ensure accountability and traceability, which creates opportunities to identify and correct parts of the chain where processes are breaking down, Farnum said.

In turn, Agri Food certifies the validity of VTAS, he said, adding that Agri Food's own processes are under USDA oversight. This makes VeriPrime the only food chain traceability program in the U.S. with an accredited USDA certifying entity, he and Crain said.

### Cornerstones

Food moving through a chain receives the VTAS "Certified Traceable" label, or seal,

that's affixed to the food packages and informs consumers that the products are traceable back to their origin.

Crain and Farnum said VTAS cannot trace a package of beef or pork, for instance, back to the cow or hog from which it came, explaining that while the system can evolve into something that exact, it would make processes more expensive and would require electronic identification. However, they added that members could decide to carry traceability to this extreme.

"What we have now is the cable across the canyon to build that kind of bridge," Crain said.

"We can track back to a farm, but not an animal or an acre," Farnum added.

Stated simply, VTAS can follow cattle from a feedlot or hogs from a farm through the chain, meaning it can put the traceability label on all of the packages of beef or pork that come from those cattle or hogs. The labels on the beef packages, for instance, would all have the same code, allowing a package of beef to be tracked to a group of animals, i.e., the feedlot.

Accordingly, for the first time, consumers can be assured "at a glance that the food they are purchasing is traceable to its source," Crain (pictured) said. Emphasizing that the American food supply already is one of the world's safest, he said this is "the first and best step to safer food."



The need to have traceability is urgent, he said, noting that local and state agencies

investigate foodborne illness outbreaks every day, that 1,000 Americans are hospitalized every day due to foodborne illnesses and that 5,000 Americans die every year due to foodborne diseases.

"Traceability is the cornerstone of food safety, and VTAS ... ensures that everyone is accountable along each step in the food chain," he said.

### Safer and speedier

When asked if VTAS raises a liability issue for members of a chain, Crain and Farnum said liability actually decreases for producers, packers and other members of the chain due to the implementation of food safety best management practices and because the nature of the audits and certifications encourage continuous improvement.

VTAS decreases the likelihood of a foodborne illness and puts members of the chain "in a more defensible position," Farnum said.

What's also important, Crain said, is that in the event of a foodborne illness, traceability allows officials to work back through the chain quickly in response to the outbreak.

Farnum agreed. "Traceability keeps a doctor's office event from becoming a public health crisis event," he said. "It speeds up response."

Crain and Farnum are both veterinarians, and Crain is chief executive officer of VeriPrime, while Farnum is director of Agri Food, which operates under ISO standards.

VeriPrime is headquartered in Wichita, Kan., and Agri Food is located in Meade, Kan. Additional information on Agri Food is available at [www.agrifoodcert.com](http://www.agrifoodcert.com).

## Here's the point

**TODAY'S livestock and poultry producers don't just produce the world's safest food supply; they are holding themselves accountable directly to consumers for meat and poultry that's safe and wholesome.**

A new example is VeriPrime and the VeriPrime Traceability Assurance System (VTAS) in which not only livestock and poultry producers but grain and feed producers, packers/processors and retailers are participating in supply chains that have established food safety and traceability protocols and have opened themselves to audits to make sure protocols are being met.

VTAS includes a label, or seal (pictured), that goes on packages of meat and poultry and tells consumers that the products can be tracked back to farms and fields of origin in the event of foodborne illnesses.

The process is a "cornerstone" to responsible, safe food production, according to the founders of VeriPrime.

That modern U.S. agriculture, which also produces the most abundant and affordable food supply in the world, is taking these kinds of steps is a message food chains should make sure consumers know by telling them in interactions and referring them to [www.FeedstuffsFoodLink.com](http://www.FeedstuffsFoodLink.com).

