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Agri-Tech: Two organizations work together for food verification

By Andrea Johnson

Businesses and entrepreneurs are working very hard to assure consumers that the food they purchase meets strict standards.

One food supply-chain cooperative that intends to be a leader in food verification is VeriPrime, Inc., based out of Wichita, Kan.

Company officials believe that VeriPrime can offer the tools, follow-through and branding needed to meet consumer standards for every food item found in a grocery store or a foodservice institution.

The 5-year-old verification company will offer traceability from the farm to the fork.

VeriPrime's goal is to develop and maintain a program with viable, credible and monitored standards for traceability.

The standards that VeriPrime applies are ISO - the International Organization of Standards - no longer limited just to manufactured products. VeriPrime hopes to eventually have a label on every food product across the United States.

The VeriPrime Certified Traceable label - a checkmark in a shield with the words "VeriPrime Certified Traceable" - would indicate that the food meets stringent traceability requirements.

The foods would be certified traceable from the farm to the consumer.

By offering traceability, VeriPrime will also be providing standardized products that meet National Animal Identification System requirements and country-of-origin labeling (COOL) requirements.

Anyone who has a hand in the food delivery system has the opportunity to join VeriPrime.

In fact, VeriPrime is a member-owned federation of cooperatives including producers, processors and retailers. Very soon, VeriPrime members intend to offer retailers and distributors a collective offering of food that has met VeriPrime's traceability standards.

Company officials hope that retailers will find the integrated and nationwide system more economical and efficient than stand-alone product verified traceability systems.

"The last three years we've been working diligently to finish up the program," said Scott Crain, DVM, and co-founder of VeriPrime. "Traceability is the cornerstone of food safety. You can't manage what you can't track."

An important step for the success of VeriPrime was achieved Dec. 18. On that date, a separate company, Agri Food Certification, was accepted to perform audits on organizations such as VeriPrime's members and other food chain companies.

USDA determined that Agri Food Certification met ISO 65 general requirements for bodies operating product certification systems.

It is the first and currently the only private certification body that can apply and certify ISO feed and food traceability standards.

Agri Food Certification holds an exclusive agreement with VeriPrime, Inc. to administer VeriPrime's traceability system.

While Agri Food will be subject to rigorous audits by USDA, VeriPrime members will be subject to rigorous audits by Agri Food Certification.

At the heart of VeriPrime's traceability program is the VeriPrime Traceability Assurance System (VTAS).

Food retailers who elect to offer consumers "Certified Traceable" foods through VTAS would complete a series of steps so they could deliver certified traceable products to consumers.

First, they would need to read and complete the VeriPrime Traceability Standard methods that require a complete audit trail for tracing livestock and food products from point of origin to point of consumption, based on ISO standards. VeriPrime would work with direct and indirect suppliers to meet the traceability standards.

Then the applicant would download and fill out applications, and submit an annual certification fee.

VeriPrime would then send the application to Agri Food Certification for review. The applicant would pay for an audit of their business conducted by an Agri Food Certification trained and qualified subcontract auditor.

"The inspector would come to their place of business and walk through their traceability system and their quality management system to look at the accountability procedures they have in place for traceability," said Dave Farnum, certification director of Agri Food Certification, of Meade, Kan.

Agri Food Certification would next review all materials and the inspection report. If all standards were met, the food company would receive a traceability assurance certification. If all standards were not met, the company would receive a notice of noncompliance with an opportunity for corrective action.

Foods that met the standards for traceability could use the VeriPrime label.

The businesses could then participate in a unified delivery of products to the retailer or distributor of food-to-fork certified traceable products.

"VeriPrime is structured for equal partnership for producers to work with retailers to deliver a certified product to the consumer," said Crain. "That allows a rancher or a farmer to be involved in VeriPrime and put together the traceability program."

For more information, visit www.veriprime.org.