

New jobs may trail safe-food trackers

Three years after the food assurance company VeriPrime Inc. officially launched, it's finally off the ground.

With it, the promise of hundreds of white-collar jobs could be fulfilled over the next three years, and there's the potential for it and another Wichita company to significantly grow their businesses.

"It's the first and only certified, traceable program to be assured that food can be traced from the farm to the fork," says Scott Crain, VeriPrime's chief executive.

VeriPrime is a member-owned cooperative that includes everyone along the food chain - from growers to processors to retailers.

After the company formed, the members decided that to have any credibility, an independent third-party auditor would have to certify the process.

Enter Agri Food Certification, a year-old Meade company that in December received USDA accreditation to be a certifying body for traceable foods under the same international standards that allow food to be certified organic.

Agri Food's auditors will ensure VeriPrime follows standards before allowing food to carry the VeriPrime mark through the VeriPrime Traceability Assurance System.

"It's a very, very, very rigorous process," Crain says of getting to this point. "It just took a lot of work. It's never been done before, and the industry was learning together on how to do this."

Agri Food is moving its headquarters to Wichita. That's where the new jobs will be created in coming years.

"The important message is that certified, traceable food is the first step to safer food," Crain says. "We do have the safest food in the world, but there's a need for safer food."

He says one in four Americans suffers from a food-borne illness every year.

"Traceability is the cornerstone of food safety," Crain says. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."