

STAR *Gazette*

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Case-Level Traceability & the PTI

While DataBar codes are used for item-level identification on labels for loose produce, the PTI appears to be picking up steam in implementing case-level traceability. In October 2007, the PTI or Produce Traceability Initiative, began as a joint project comprised of packer/shippers, retailers, and industry organizations that set out to move the supply chain to a common standard for electronic case-level produce traceability by the end of 2012. It is believed that three kinds of traceability 'programs' exist: internal (trace back methods within an organization-often proprietary), external (the exchange of data between trade partners that may track/trace information)

DataBar -- Still Rolling Along

DataBar coding on loose produce labels has rapidly increased during the past six months, particularly in Washington State, as apple and pear packer/shippers converted much of their inventories to DataBar. As it now stands, approximately 60% of loose apples and pears in North America are now barcoded, as well as nearly 50% of all tomatoes. In the 4th quarter of 2008, barcoded peppers and avocados increased in number in all growing/packing regions.

What appears to be the next wave of activity stems from California stonefruit. This commodity which historically is comparatively PLU-intense and comprised of many marketing groups, has many packer/shippers poised to transition to DataBar. Due to the number of enquiries received on DataBar over the winter, a labeling workshop was held at UC Kearney Ag Research Center on Thursday, February 26th. The half-day workshop was geared toward sharing information on how to transition to DataBar labeling, along with Q & A and relevant discussions. There were also presentations given on the PTI - Produce Traceability Initiative (see article "Case-Level Traceability and the PTI") as well as COOL and other timely topics.

If you have questions about DataBar or transitioning to DataBar-coded labels, contact your Sinclair sales representative or Customer Service. For a list of Sinclair contacts, please click here: http://www.sinclair-intl.com/pages/contacts_main.html

and whole-chain (internal + external).

The PTI uses the GTIN (Global Trade Item Number) assigned at the case level which is intended to provide transparent, whole-chain (internal + external) traceability. Cases would use a standard label template that shows at least the GTIN, the lot number and the pack date in both humanly readable form and this information would be encoded in a Barcode 128 for scannable, electronic purposes.

The implementation of the PTI is a multi-year approach, employing 'milestones' beginning in 1Q 2009, with the last milestone targeted for 2012. For more information on the PTI, click <http://www.producetraceability.org/>

iQ: A Real Cost Savings

Since the re-launch of the iQ Benchtop in 2006, sales have been steady with interest from universities and research institutes as well as Sinclair's customer base. Over the past eight months at Sinclair, an updated focus on the strengths of the iQ technology has taken place, and a new iQ product team is now in place.

Given the current economic climate, the cost savings attributed to non-destructive firmness testing is more important than ever for any business looking to optimize quality and reduce or minimize cost.

The Benchtop is currently used as a direct replacement for more traditional destructive tests,--- and the cost of the iQ equipment is easy to justify. A typical avocado packer generally has to meet stringent quality specifications, and to do this they currently destructively test their fruit for firmness on intake, during ripening, and as it is packed. Using traditional destructive tests, by the time the pallet is ready to send, up to 5% of the fruit has been destroyed by QC checks. Information provided by a UK customer (below) highlight the value of this fruit. They pack five pallets per day (1,000Kg each) worth \$2,200 each, packing 250 days per year. These 1,250 pallets are worth \$2,745,000 and the 5% of fruit destroyed using destructive firmness testing totals \$140,000 per year! A Benchtop costs only a fraction of the value of the fruit destroyed and in this case, saves well over \$100,000.

The other saving an iQ Benchtop offers is time: with an automated tray, it measures fruit 4 times faster than destructive measures with the added advantage of data capture using a PC or PDA for traceability through the supply chain. This time savings can be used to take larger samples for increased accuracy.

Aside from its potential as a stand alone unit, the Benchtop is also an excellent way to become acquainted with firmness testing technology before converting to an online system which increases the amount of benefits and ROI even more. For more information on Sinclair iQ firmness testing, contact Alex Dietz at alex@sinclair-intl.com or James Packham at james@sinclair-intl.com.

Why DataBar Label Size is Important

The move to using DataBar for many packer/shippers means having to re-think label design, and along with this, often label size. The barcode can take up much of a label's "real estate" and to accommodate this, many packer/shippers have opted for a larger label.

When it comes to label size, the 'rule of thumb' is: the smaller the fruit, the smaller the label due to 1) the circumference playing a role in the conformity of the label and 2) labels should look proportionate to the overall size of fruit. Label conformity--- one of the measures used when Sinclair Service conducts field label trials--- measures how well the label conforms to the curvature of the fruit. Generally, using a larger label will have an affect on label adhesion rates. This varies widely by commodity and from bulk-fill to tray labeling. To help get the best adhesion rates, especially if you have made a change in label size due to DataBar, take note of the following:

1. **Always clean bellows at regular intervals.** The following is the suggested cleaning intervals for some popular commodities: Citrus- 40-60 hours of run time; Stonefruit- at the end of each day; Avocados- every 40 hours; and Apples and Pears- every 40 hours.
2. **Assign a dedicated label operator** to oversee labeling.
3. **Minimize incidental contact after labeling**, including transfer points in particular brushes or belts, which can remove labels.
4. **Do not run faster than necessary.** Fruit with difficult to label surfaces (e.g. peaches) runs best at speeds no faster than 600cpm.

Minimize fruit treatments. Oils and wax are natural barriers to adhesives being able to grab and stick. Heavy coatings of mineral oil or waxes minimize the ability for the label adhesive to attach to the fruit surface.

Also, as a reminder if you are incorporating DataBar into your labeling mix, do not forget to change the indexing for each labeling applicator. This is necessary if you are switching back and forth between two different (index) label sizes: for example, a 2.5-20 and a 3.0-26.

In North America, Sinclair Technical Service offers Label Operator Training and will show your label operator(s) how to optimize performance of your Sinclair labeling equipment. If you have made a change to label size due to DataBar, this is the perfect time to schedule a trained Sinclair Technical Service team member to conduct Label Operator Training on-site, in your packinghouse. To schedule a date, contact Richard Espinoza at richarde@sinclair-intl.com or your local Service representative. Currently, label operator training is available in both English as well as Spanish.

Canadian Language Law Update

For quite some time French language packaging legislation has been in place for Canada, particularly Quebec. However, recently there have been some changes to information that appears on individual fruit and vegetable labels. In early 2009, CPMA (Canadian Produce Marketing Association) began advising members engaged in commerce in Canada inclusive of Quebec, and wishing to use PLU labels to provide country of origin in the form of country name, only. For example, do not use "Product of" or "Grown in", etc when designating country/ state/ region.

Additionally, any information on the PLU label not exempted under the Quebec Charter of the French Language requires translation into French. This language legislation (Division I, Exceptions to Sec. 51 of the Charter of the French Language, No. 7) exempts the following information on a product from translation into French, only:

1. the firm name established outside of Quebec;
2. a name of origin, the denomination of an exotic product or foreign specialty, a heraldic motto or any other non-commercial motto;
3. a place name designating a place situated outside Quebec or a place name in such other language as officialized by the Commission de toponymie du Quebec, a family name, a given name or the name of a personality or character or a distinctive name of a culture nature; and
4. a recognized trade mark within the meaning of the Trade Marks Act (R.S.C. (1985). C. T-13), unless the French version has been registered.

Again, this advisory applies only to PLU labels affixed to loose produce. For more information on the Quebec Charter of the French Language:

Exceptions link: http://www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/english/regulations/reg_business.html

Full charter link: <http://www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/english/charter/index.html>