

Functions of the EU Traceability Regulations in the Food Safety System—From Risk Management to Informed Consumer Choice

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Abstract

Traceability refers to the ability to trace, track and follow food or food ingredients through all stages of production and distribution. Following such devastating food safety crises as mad cow disease in the 1990s, the European Union realized the importance of a traceability system to maintaining high-levels of protection of human life and health. Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 thus requires that food manufacturers, distributors, and retailers participate in the traceability system, so that targeted and accurate withdrawals can be undertaken. Meanwhile, consumers can use food information to pursue other personal goals, including economic, environmental, social and ethical ones. Informed consumer choice therefore serves as a purpose besides risk management in the EU food traceability system. On the other hand, trade secrets, transparency issues along the food supply chain, and the legality of SPS measures under the WTO framework could pose great challenges to the performance of the system.

Key Words: traceability, food safety, risk management, informed choice