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# Enterprise resource planning – the future of the meat industry supply chain

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Today's landscape of the meat industry within supply chain software differs markedly to that of the past. There are two issues that are now more important than ever to suppliers – traceability and quality assurance. These two qualities are demanded by retailers and consumers alike, putting the onus on suppliers in the meat trade to assure quality at all times while demonstrating their ability to trace their meat from farm to fork.

These are testing requirements, ferociously scrutinised in a climate where transparency is demanded. An inability to assure quality or demonstrate traceability is simply not an option. I predict that in the next few years consumers and retailers will expect the food industry to be able to provide comprehensive traceability information at the touch of a button.

How then will meat suppliers satisfy these voracious demands? The answer lies with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software – the future of supply chain industries.

## Technology for traceability

There is no room for supplier error when it comes to addressing the issue of traceability. The Food Standards Agency's Meat Industry Guide stipulates that systems must be in place to ensure that the traceability of food, and food producing animals, can be established at all stages of production, processing and distribution.

At present, the reality is that many food safety monitoring processes still use manual, paper-based checks. Given that meat suppliers should be able to pinpoint where produce has come from, what processes it has gone through and where it ends up, with the emphasis on providing this information instantaneously, such a situation is simply unsustainable.

Paper-based checks also pose problems when retailers require suppliers to quickly and efficiently provide reliable data in the event of a problem with a product. This is

exceptionally difficult to do with manually recorded data as the process of analysing that data can quickly become a logistical nightmare.

In short, old-hat, paper-based checks are time consuming and carry a high risk of error and non-compliance – exposing food chain suppliers to considerable and unnecessary risk.

With the meat industry supply chain subject to greater levels of public interest than ever before, the ability to meet consumer and retailer demand for proof of traceability, and to comply with Government regulations, will require companies to invest in more sophisticated IT solutions. It is through embracing ERP technology that suppliers will reach a situation where they can properly ensure they maintain accurate records capable of standing up to scrutiny.

## Guarantor of transparency

Information Technology solutions, such as food specific ERP systems, can help food businesses efficiently track and trace all aspects of a product's manufacture; from raw material intake, through production, to where it goes when it leaves the factory.

Supply chain IT systems such as LINKFRESH, which is fully integrated with the Microsoft Dynamics platform, help the meat and food industry efficiently manage every aspect of the food supply chain. This includes production, forecasting, planning, inventory management, quality, full traceability and logistics. Through doing so, ERP provides suppliers with certainty that they can comply fully with all relevant regulations and are in a position where they are easily able to adapt to new legislation.

ERP technology offers a range of benefits for food businesses as it gives real-time insight into the entire supply chain – providing suppliers with the ability they need to provide instantaneous and accurate traceability information. As opposed to a situation where data is only available to people with access to the physical paperwork, electronic data capture means data can immediately be shared with the wider workforce. This assists in flagging



problems such as quality issues or order shortages as they occur, enabling management to take rapid, pre-emptive action to head off a potential customer relationship issue.

Through ERP software food processors achieve more efficient labour, reduced waste, faster financial reporting and accounting and increased profits. Without real-time insight, suppliers are open to supply problems and will struggle to provide reliable data quickly in the event of a problem with the product. It can also leave suppliers open to emergency product withdrawal (EPW) fees.

## An efficient approach

Traceability and quality assurance are two supplier considerations which go hand in hand. To assure quality at every stage, clear lines of traceability are a necessity. It is through the ability to track and trace a product throughout the supply chain that visibility of stock movement and quality-control data is improved. Whereas it was commonplace in the past for suppliers to manage traceability and quality assurance through two separate manual processes, ERP technology now allows them to coordinate these processes to ensure greater accuracy.

In the past, meat suppliers have reported that it took eight hours to collate all the paperwork required for a traceability

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report. Using ERP it now takes 15 minutes, a 97% reduction in traceability costs. In terms of managing the quality assurance process through the supply chain, some suppliers found themselves having to carry out 11 separate reports. As suppliers increasingly move to embrace ERP technology, the future of supply chain traceability and quality assurance looks very different.

## Quality assurance in the cloud

LINKFRESH is transforming the quality control and traceability processes for a range of clients operating in the meat industry supply chain. By harnessing the power of ERP, LINKFRESH Cloud Quality Assurance (QA) tackles the inefficiencies of the past, providing suppliers with an effective and user-friendly quality assurance tool at their fingertips.

As opposed to time consuming manual reports, cutting-edge technology now allows suppliers to record quality assurance process at the touch of a button.

LINKFRESH Cloud QA can be downloaded and self-installed to iOS, Windows Mobile or Google Android devices, making quality assurance processes more efficient and accessible than ever before. Tasks such as security management, user administration

and QA test configuration can now all be completed remotely, significantly improving efficiency.

Thanks to the innovative store and forward technology, it can be ensured that the application is always available even when internet connectivity is lost.

How is this possible? Quality assurance data is collected and stored in the local storage capacity of the device being used, which is then resynchronised once connectivity is restored.

Store & Forward technology then sends data back to base and users can then log into a secure portal to view real-time test reports from anywhere in the world.

The ingenuity of LINKFRESH Cloud QA does not end there however. ERP technology can utilise many of the features present on the devices onto which it is installed.

From accessing GPS location-based services and storing photographs, which can be appended to QA records, to utilising signature capture and barcode scanning capability a range of solutions are provided.

What this means for the quality assurance process is that, simply, ERP technology allows users to quickly analyse collected quality assurance data to see what product has passed through quality assurance procedures, which procedures were performed, where and by whom on which device.

It is effective and accurate – with no paperwork to be filed. This results in a more efficient and transparent system, where accountability can be easily prioritised.

## The future of the supply chain

As technology continues to move forward one thing is abundantly clear – the days of paper-based recording are nearing their end. In its place, powerful ERP technology has emerged. This has profound implications for both supply chain traceability and quality assurance.

By realising the power of ERP, suppliers in the meat industry can minimise the risk of error inherent within traditional processes. More impressive still, they could achieve this while vastly increasing efficiency and reducing costs.

To achieve the transparency required to comply with regulations both now and in the future, ERP software is essential. In an environment where the meat industry supply chain needs to have the ability to recall potentially unsafe food straight away, ERP can provide the certainty suppliers require. That is why ERP software will become the norm for any meat supplier to the major retailers.

Forward thinking businesses which start implementing this technology now will be ahead of the game. ■