Houser's Produce Farm

Asset management software delivers quick visibility into the supply chain & meets new regulations for food safety.

Houser's Produce Farm Implements RFID Tracking for FSMA Food Traceability

Introduction

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) section 204, also known as the FDA Food Traceability Final Rule, requires growers and suppliers to establish traceable record-keeping of certain food groups to protect public health. On November 21, 2022, the Final Rule, titled "Requirements for Additional Traceability Records for Certain Foods", was published. It outlines the critical tracking events (CTEs) and key data elements (KDEs) each producer must keep.

Starting as a home vegetable sales stand, Houser's Produce Farm (Houser) has grown and expanded operations over the past 30-plus years into several thousand acres of total crop land. Houser started selling to individuals, then to local grocery stores, and has gradually expanded into major supermarket chains. Based in Sharpsburg, MD, the produce supplier has become a reputable name in the region for fresh fruits and vegetables and quick field-to-store stocking cycles.

Faced with an outdated barcode system, and desiring to bring their operations into compliance with FSMA 204 regulations, Houser sought a solution that would make their operations compliant with new industry mandates while improving their overall efficiency. RMS Omega and SDG Systems teamed with Houser to implement a rugged mobile RFID solution with SDG Systems' TallyFlow Asset Management software for traceable record keeping of lots and shipments.

The Challenge

Houser's Produce Farm installed a barcode tracking system several years ago. While the system provided some basic asset tracking information, it could not effectively record each individual box of produce. Additionally, slow, out-of-date hardware made it time-consuming to retrieve sales records. Mr. Houser expressed, "It was faster for me to look up items in Quickbooks by date and food type than it was to use the barcode system." With the upcoming deadlines for FSMA compliance and a cumbersome barcode system, Houser sought a new solution that would work with RFID, be efficient to use, and comply with new regulations.

Before Implementing RFID...

> ❝ It was faster for me to look up items in Quickbooks by date and food type than it was to use the barcode system. ❞
>
> **- Mr. Houser, Houser Produce Farm**

The Solution

RMS Omega collaborated with software partner, SDG Systems to provide a complete solution to Houser, including SDG's TallyFlow software, handheld Zebra RFID readers, mobile printers and RFID labels.

Since 2018, TallyFlow has been helping businesses transform their asset management, providing a mobile and cloud-based solution. Supporting barcodes and RFID, the mobile and web applications provide intuitive user interfaces with tracking, traceability, and inventory management functionality.

TallyFlow software offered an easy-to-use solution for tracking products through the entire workflow that Houser required, from boxing produce to storage and shipping. To maintain compliance with the FSMA standards, TallyFlow can generate and use GS1 tags. The tags are encoded with a lot number, company prefix, product identifier, and serial number. The GS1 tags allow shippers, grocers, and compliance officers to quickly identify the farm and product from either the barcode or the RFID tag. TallyFlow also records the invoice numbers and other information essential to Houser's implementation. Using both parent and child tags allows TallyFlow to quickly move individual or groups of items.

Implementation

GS1 Company and Product Identification

TallyFlow uses GS1 tags for global traceability. Producers register with gs1.org to obtain company and product identities. Once these are obtained from GS1, the producer can enter values into TallyFlow settings for the mobile application to generate the tags required for traceability. Houser has approximately a dozen different types of produce that they sell.

Packing FSMA-Regulated Foods

While packing boxes of produce or other FSMA-regulated foods, TallyFlow Mobile prints GS1-compliant RFID and barcode labels for a box or pallet (a parent tag of the individual boxes). Encoded into each box tag is the producer, the product number, a lot number, and a serial number. TallyFlow uses its product category feature to determine which product is being packed. For example, a category of Cucumbers GS1-01 will use product ID 01 to associate with the product being boxed. A worker will place these tags on the boxes. When printing a parent tag, such as a pallet tag, each subsequent box tag is associated with the parent until a new parent tag is created or cleared. TallyFlow Mobile adjusts the lot numbers and serial numbers automatically.

Tracking Shipping through Fulfillment

During the shipping process, the producer will scan or enter an invoice number or other identifier with the shipment so that the items are associated with this invoice. Employing optional parent tags for grouping assets, a producer can move a pallet or group of tags together with a single scan. In the TallyFlow web application, users can search for items by lot number, product type, specific tag or invoice number.

The Results

In pre-season testing, the TallyFlow system performed according to the needs and expectations of Houser's Produce Farm. Workers were able to generate pallet tags and item tags based on the produce that was being boxed. The mobile software allowed them to conveniently print multiple labels at a time to place on boxes, then scan a parent tag to ship the entire pallet.

Houser's Produce Farm was on a mission to update their product traceability system and to become compliant with the FSMA regulations. By implementing the TallyFlow RFID system, Houser is now able to easily ship their produce to grocery stores with full traceability. The TallyFlow cloud and mobile software associate the customer orders with the lot number and type of produce using GS1 SGTIN barcode and RFID tags. In the rare case of a food safety concern or recall, Houser is prepared to address such issues.

The Food Safety 204 regulation deadline is quickly approaching. The regulations require full traceability of produce and other foods. Businesses have until January 20, 2026, to comply or face financial penalties.

Learn More

If you would like to better understand how TallyFlow can help with FSMA compliance, or see an online demo, please contact us.

RMSOMEGA TECHNOLOGIES

Improving Outcomes Through Strategic Technology Solutions

RMS Omega is a technology integrator with extensive experience developing strategic tracking and automation solutions. We offer a vast portfolio of technology and professional services, including RFID, barcode, data collection, wireless infrastructure, enterprise mobility applications, voice automation, location technology, and more, throughout the United States and Canada. With RMS Omega, organizations become empowered with oversight and peace of mind that their data, inventory, assets, and people are always at the right place at the right time.

SDG SYSTEMS

SDG Systems is a software solutions company focused on helping you gain greater value from your data. Using RFID, IoT, and other technologies, SDG's TallyFlow tracking and PhotoTag software platforms help improve productivity, profitability and safety while reducing time and material waste.

To schedule a demo, call us at 888.857.8402, or email info@rmsomega.com.