Module 50
Traceability

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Introduction

Traceability is the ability to trace any product back to its original source. In terms of fruit production and export, traceability is the ability to trace back a specific carton of fruit, from the market place, through the entire process to the orchard in which the fruit was grown.

Traceability has become a requirement from an official point of view. Each and every carton of citrus exported should be traceable back down to the farm level or the packhouse level. There is a requirement for one step up, one step down traceability, which is basically the ability to see where fruit went to and where it has come from.

Managing Risk

Traceability is critical to the operating of the farm for a number of reasons, but essentially all these reasons tend to boil down to the ability to manage risk. If you have an excellent traceability system your ability to manage your risk is so much greater.

Managing Food Safety Risk

Just looking at a couple of those risks, the first is food safety risk. When fruit is exported overseas and is found to be contaminated or not fit for human consumption anymore, it is quite critical that that fruit can be identified, isolated and, if necessary, recalled. The only way you can do that is if you got good information about what has happened to that product.
Managing Business Risk

In that same respect there is an element of business risk that is associated with exporting fruit, if anything should happen to your fruit. Obviously if it becomes contaminated you would need to destroy that fruit and it would be a loss of income.

Traceability systems can help prevent your brand and your product being implicated where you can demonstrate that your fruit went to a different market or was never part of that setup. So it is a requirement that you can demonstrate that the product that was implicated is not your product or if it is, be able to identify and destroy the product, if necessary.

Managing Product Quality

The final risk and it is perhaps a little less obvious when it comes to traceability and the need to manage risk is product quality management. Traceability is really the process of knowing what is happening to fruit all along the chain. Where the deviations from set norms or set quality parameters occur, you can pick that up and the system is able to feed that back through to the owner.

It becomes a very useful tool in managing quality problems. We are a long way from our markets in South Africa and if growers are able to identify quality problems early, it certainly helps in reducing the claims on the quality problems that are observed overseas. In addition to that, it will help correct the source of the problem, whether that will be in the packhouse or in the orchard.

Conclusion

There are numerous reasons why traceability is important. Underlying all of them is the need to manage one or more business risks. From the buyer’s point of view, looking across the supply chain, a complete traceability system allows him to identify the origins of a product through a process of queries and communication. From the seller’s point of view, it allows him to follow the path taken by his produce as it makes its way from the farm gate to the final buyer.
Active learning

Watch the DVD clips, read through the learning material and do workplace research to gather the knowledge and information to complete the assignments below.

**Activity 50.1 – Flowchart**

Draw a flowchart explaining how a valencia bought in a supermarket in London can be traced back to where and when the fruit was packed, the person that packed it, and the orchard where it was produced.

**Activity 50.2 – Case Study**

A carton of marsh grapefruit arrives in Japan. When the carton is opened, it is found that the fruit are infected with Diplodia SER. The fruit is traced back to you, but none of your retention samples or any other test show any sign of infection, while your neighbour, whose fruit is packed at the same packhouse, have problems with Diplodia. How will you be able to prove that the infected fruit does not belong to you?
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Activity 50.2 – Case Study

Consider the case study below and answer the question based on it.

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