

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS VITAL IN GIVING YOU THE EDGE

This month, Richard Jones of Anglia Business Solutions explains how efficient quality assurance systems are a vital boon to any fresh produce business

QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) has always been a fundamental part of any fresh produce operation, and makes the difference between success and failure where customer satisfaction is concerned.

At Anglia Business Solutions, we experience many different business scenarios where companies need efficient QA systems to maximise efficiencies. These days, not only does the product need to be checked but packaging, labelling and hygiene standards also have to be met. Traditional means of carrying out this task have involved reams of paper and the manual collation of reports. However, in today's fast-moving world, such processes are getting well past their sell-by date.

There are many issues on working with manually operated paperwork systems. The sheer volume of data that now needs to be captured means that, invariably, the administration burden on a business increases. Apart from the cost, there are the errors that invariably occur while transcribing information from one place to another. Furthermore, it becomes difficult if not impossible to detect and therefore prevent the re-occurrence of the issues that cause quality failures in the first place. Information recorded manually is notoriously difficult to analyse and share, while trends get buried in the morass of data.



It is in these areas that the advances in mobile technology can help. The key here is early capture of the required information, irrespective of location. Being in a position to move the quality control (QC) function literally to 'the field' creates more time to resolve issues, even before the product is transported to the packhouse. Mobile computer technology facilitates these instant updates wherever the QCs need to work. This usually means using secure connections over the mobile phone network to transmit the information. The net result is that the packhouse gets earlier visibility of the arrival of produce, as well as the expected quality.

In addition to early notification of the arrival of goods, a well-structured mobile application can assist in other ways. This is where a positive release mechanism can be introduced. A positive release mechanism is an over-arching process that monitors all QC results to ensure that all checks are performed before goods can be dispatched. This is a good example of where process and computer systems can work well together. An automated positive release process can collect QC test results for a given order and provide guidance to show when it is safe for product to

be dispatched.

Finally, an area that safeguards the labelling of the product and packaging is essential. These days, labels hold a considerable amount of product information. From country of origin to promotional information, they are an essential sales aid to the supermarkets, as well as a vital tool in traceability and product management. Getting any of the details wrong can have serious consequences for the supplier. From a customer viewpoint, G's Marketing is an excellent example where such mobile applications have made a significant difference to the business. Since implementing its mobility applications, the company has avoided early product withdrawal (EPW) fines potentially estimated at £250,000, protected more than £10 million of business and reduced its QC wages bill.

In summary, well-structured mobile QC systems with a touch of innovation can make a substantial difference to the fortunes of fresh produce organisations. They provide that vital ingredient time as well, delivering accurate management information on the quality of produce bought and sold. In an ever-more competitive market, they can provide that vital edge in customer service which protects the long-term future of the business relationship. ○

