

PTI Journey Takes Publix to Improved Productivity

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We distribute close to 100 million cases of produce a year from multiple distribution centers to 1,047 stores. To enhance traceability for the benefit of all of our customers, we have committed ourselves to adopting a common, standardized approach to identifying produce cases throughout the supply chain.

By following PTI guidelines, Publix has implemented radio frequency receiving, allowing us to scan by lot code. While we had a few hurdles along the way, we do expect to see improvements in accuracy and productivity in the near future. These improvements will be based on the re-engineering of our receiving processes.

Initial questions about applying PTI guidelines to our operations included concerns about the necessary process changes, new technology usage, and suppliers' readiness for full implementation and related costs. We decided to focus on inbound traceability first, which required redesigning our receiving process. Publix has moved from a paper-based process with manual product identification to wirelessly scanning product barcodes to automatically capture product information, including lot numbers, expiration dates and even country of origin, using GS1 standards.

While adopting new technology wasn't a significant hurdle for us, managing the change process effectively required a strategic and collaborative approach. To this end, we organized a PTI project team to include representatives not only from produce and distribution, but also from industrial engineering, business analysis and information systems. We now have a truly cross-functional team working on the project, with the full support of executive management. Training and support also played a critical role in staying on task for full PTI implementation.

No retailer can succeed with PTI implementation without our suppliers being ready to provide the right data in the right format at the right time. By personally interacting with and providing PTI documents and best practice guidance to our suppliers, we were able to move toward conducting GTIN audits twice a year and implementing vendor scorecards for continuous improvement.

Our next step at Publix is to prepare for scanning lot codes for outbound shipping, and we plan to let our fellow PTI volunteers know what we learn in the process.