Headquartered in Orlando, Fla., Darden is the world’s largest full-service restaurant company with core brands that include Red Lobster, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse and many other well-known establishments operated by Darden’s Specialty Restaurant Group.

At the May PTI Leadership Council meeting, Darden provided an update on the important work it is involved in with “marrying” PTI with the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative as well as leveraging the traceability guidance developed for the seafood industry and the meat and poultry industry.

“Traceability is at the heart of all of these voluntary industry efforts,” said Ana Hooper, Vice President of Total Quality for Darden. “By working with our trading partners to implement the guidance that has been created for all the food categories, we are improving product traceability and ultimately enhancing food safety for our customers.”

As a founding member and active participant in these industry initiatives, Darden laid out a vision of what it calls the “Darden Direct Supply” – a transformational program to automate supply chain processes to link supply and demand information while increasing traceability and reducing costs for everyone along the supply chain.

To facilitate the flow of product information, Darden has committed to using GS1 Standards and set milestones for its suppliers to phase in compliance over a period of time. Earlier this year Darden suppliers were asked to obtain GS1 issued company prefixes, assign GLNs to all locations, and GTINs to all products and communicate all of this information to Darden.

Dec. 2012 marks the milestone for suppliers to scan and store case-level barcode information on shipments to distribution centers with the next step being that distributors scan and store this same information on outbound shipments as well.

“By the end of the year, we are aiming to have all suppliers incorporate case-level barcodes with corresponding GTINs and Lot/Batch information,” said Hooper. “We are confident that using industry-vetted standards such as GS1 will drive mutual benefits, including increased productivity, reduced administrative costs and improved traceability to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act.”

Darden owns and operates more than 1,900 restaurants across North America, employing 180,000 employees and serving more than 400 million meals annually. To learn more about the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative, visit [www.gs1us.org/foodservice](http://www.gs1us.org/foodservice).