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Traceability System for Indian Grapes Exported to the European Market

Customer: APEDA, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India

Introduction

Codex Alimentarius Commission defines 'Traceability' as "the ability to follow the movement of a food through specified stage(s) of production, processing and distribution.

Traceability should provide a verifiable documentation for an effective food control system and should aim at limiting the discontinuity of the information through the food supply chain.

In practice the term traceability stands for a system of record keeping and documentation by operators that enables tracking of the movement of a product or ingredient through the food chain.

The challenge for Traceability in the India

This was the mammoth challenge that APEDA took upon itself in the year 2003 when it willed to put in place, a system for traceability in Grapes exported to the European Union, to address the concerns of the highly evolved consumers of European Union.

This was the first such attempt by an Indian Organization and in quiet determination, APEDA and the Grapes community rose to the challenge.

The challenge was seemed to be growing in complexity, largely due to the plethora of stakeholders in the supply chain of grapes export,

- The Farmers,
- State Government Horticulture Departments,
- Pack houses,
- Exporters,
- The Phyto-sanitary department
- The laboratories, and finally
- APEDA, the nodal agency for promotion.

Need for Regulation, Training and Compliance

The first task was to put in place, a Government of India regulation, would clearly spell out the procedures to be followed by all stake holders in the Grapes Sector, train them to fulfill the requirements of the regulation, co-opt the monitoring agencies in the Government and Private Sector and finally generate the necessary documentation trail for the importers. Thus was born, a path breaking regulation called the *Regulation of Export of Fresh Grapes from India through monitoring of pesticide residues.*

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Today, this regulation has put in place

- Standards to meet international market demands
- Agencies to test compliance with these standards
- And no export of fresh grapes can happen to European Union without adhering to this system.

Logicsoft Services: IT enabling the regulation, compliance and monitoring

The challenge was to design an integrated monitoring software, covering all stakeholders in the supply chain, with a centralized database. The application of this system starts at the very root of the process; Registration of farmers up to plot level, at district headquarters, by the State Horticulture departments and subsequently issuing a Registration Certificate to the Farmers.

Each plot is identified by a unique 12 digit Registration Number.

It facilitates the State Horticulture departments to tabulate their inspection details on completing their visits to the farms, after which they can recommend to the Laboratories to take samples for testing for pesticide residues. Farmers can approach any of the APEDA recognized laboratories for testing their produce.

The recommendation is mandatory and it is at the plot level.

The Laboratories record the details of the samples drawn from each plot for testing and conduct stringent testing for about 90 pesticides for residue levels. This system automatically finds out from the test measurements entered whether the sample qualifies for export to specified countries and generates their test reports.

These laboratories are among the best in the world, have high precision and calibrated equipments, use validated procedures and are ISO 17025 compliant.

Each plot is tested for pesticide residues.

In case the tests fail, the National Referral Laboratory or NRL is informed and they confirm whether an internal alert is required for this farm's produce, restricting it from export to European Union. Exporters can only source produce from the plots of the farmers whose samples pass through these tests.

Then they proceed to apply for the necessary AGMARK certification for quality and grade. At this stage, they provide the lot details, listing the registration numbers of the plots, from where he has sourced.

Exporters are identified by their APEDA registration number.

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District AGMARK officers employ accredited laboratories to check compliance for their standards through a physical inspection at the pack house where these lots are being put together to create consignment for export.

Before proceeding for their inspection, the laboratories use the online system to generate a unique Agmark Inspection ID for each lot to be inspected and this ID is pasted on the pallet of Grapes. Only those lots are accepted by the system that have passed the residue tests for the destination country. After this inspection, an ID for the Certificate of Agmark Grading or CAG ID is created by the laboratories, listing out the individual Agmark Inspection Report IDs covered under them for this particular consignment of an exporter.

AGMARK Officers issue AGMARK Certificate or CAG to the Exporter based on this, through this integrated software.

The plot number of farmer and Exporter Registration Number are all linked at this stage to the Agmark Inspection ID and to the CAG ID.

The next in the chain are the Phyto-sanitary departments at district level who carry out verification of the consignment at the registered pack houses and issue Phyto-sanitary certificates through this system.

CAG is mandatory for issue of Phyto-Sanitary Certificates.

Once this comprehensive, 360 degree evaluation procedure is complete, the consignment is declared fit & ready for shipment!

So what makes this APEDA initiative superior to conventional systems?

- Firstly, its sheer simplicity! The software can be easily used - anywhere, anytime, 24 by 7, by all authorized stakeholders, supported by a dedicated call center, with turnaround time of 2 to 10 minutes.

All they need to use is a commonly available web browser through their internet connection in a secured environment.

- Zero paperwork and Zero mistakes
- Completely credible and foolproof
- No document can be issued without going through the software.
- It has virtually reduced duplication in data capture and enables instant reference of previous steps in the supply chain.
- The inbuilt checks and balances in the software are another huge plus! It ensures that the succeeding step can be carried out only if the preceding steps were successfully complied with.
- Finally and most importantly, APEDA can trace details of the consignment right up to the plot level.

Quite simply, it adds up to a fool-proof tracking system for grape exports from India to the European Union.

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How does this system ensure traceability?

This can be traced from the Phyto-sanitary certificate that accompanies each consignment exported from India to the European Union. The Phyto-sanitary certificate carries the Agmark Certificate Number and that Number leads to the Agmark Inspection ID generated at the plot level. Or One can directly use the Agmark Inspection ID pasted on each pallet of the consignment, if it is available.

Look for the Agmark Inspection ID on each lot in the container and tally with the one mentioned on the CAG. If the numbers tally, then you are assured of the quality and safety of grapes. It is completely traceable.

