

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0924-2244(17)30410-7

DOI: [10.1016/j.tifs.2018.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2018.05.004)

Reference: TIFS 2218

To appear in: *Trends in Food Science & Technology*

Received Date: 26 June 2017

Revised Date: 22 December 2017

Accepted Date: 1 May 2018

Please cite this article as: Olsen, P., Borit, M., The components of a food traceability system, *Trends in Food Science & Technology* (2018), doi: 10.1016/j.tifs.2018.05.004.

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Title

The components of a food traceability system

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Abstract*Background*

Traceability of food products has become the focus of regional and national legislation, of many research and technical development initiatives and projects, and of many scientific articles. However, most of the scientific publications do not differentiate between the components of a traceability system, and those who do to some degree use inconsistent terminology and definitions. This weakens the analysis and the conclusions, and it can lead to misunderstanding in relation to what a traceability system is, what the components are, and how system functionality can be improved.

Scope and approach

This paper provides a structure for describing and analyzing a traceability system and emphasizes the difference between the system mechanisms as opposed to the attributes of the units that are traced. The basis for the classification outlined in this article is practical experience from traceability system implementations in the food industry, and participation in international standardization processes relating to food traceability. The references and the authors' experience are from the food sector, but the component description is likely to be relevant and applicable to any product traceability system in a supply chain.

'Traceability system' is used as a generic term in this article, encompassing the principles, practices, and standards needed to achieve traceability of food products, regardless of how

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