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## **Executive Summary – Agricultural & Food Traceability Conference** *June 9-10, 2009 ■ Des Moines, Iowa*

In 2008 and 2009, Americans became ill from consuming products containing salmonella-tainted peanuts, peanut paste, and peanut butter. Other recent food safety events have involved pet food, tomatoes, spinach, pistachios, and ground beef. All are examples of where traceability in foods that originate from bulk agricultural products would have reduced the size of the recall, the time in the headlines and the cost to the food chain.

Since 2003, Iowa State University has been researching ways of developing and implementing effective traceability systems in the bulk grain, meat, and milk supply chains. Funding for this project has been provided by the USDA-CSREES Special Grant Food Chain Economic Analysis. To share the results of this project with business, regulatory, policy, and academic professionals, a conference on Agricultural and Food Traceability was organized. The conference was held in Des Moines, Iowa on June 9-11, 2009 in conjunction with a workshop sponsored by the European Union TRACE (Tracing Food Commodities in Europe) group.

Conference participants discussed the state-of-the-art in traceability systems for bulk agricultural commodity goods. Conference content was directed towards addressing four major questions for businesses:

1. Why adopt traceability?
2. What are the risks and rewards of traceability?
3. What factors will affect the development of a traceability system for my business?
4. What management and other tools are available to assist me in implementation of a traceability system?

Forty-six people attended the conference from ten states and five countries. The majority of the attendees were from the business community or scientific testing labs, but extension and academic personnel were also well represented. In addition to listening to conference speakers, attendees also took advantage of opportunities for networking and discussion.

Conference speakers shared expertise and experiences from several different perspectives of the agricultural supply chain. Speakers discussed strategies their firms used to manage quality in raw ingredients to ensure a high quality end product, including industries such as beer, beef, milk, and soybean seeds. Other speakers explained methods to help promote and facilitate greater traceability of commodities and products within the facility. Another important component of the conference was provided by speakers who discussed regulatory and economic implications of

traceability. All emphasized that the benefits of traceability went beyond simply knowing where the product has been or where it is not – it aided the company in validating quality, locating problems, and controlling inventory for a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

At the completion of the conference, attendees were asked to complete an evaluation of the conference. Although the overall ratings were positive, written comments helped to provide a vision for additional work in bulk agricultural commodity traceability research. Conference participants were pleased with the knowledge level of the speakers and were also happy with the variety in the speaker's backgrounds and the quality of the presentations. The attendees also made valuable suggestions for improvement. The most prevalent of these was to involve more sectors of the food chain (such as retailers, growers, and consumers) and to develop the costs of traceability programs.

The conference was designed to be the conclusion of the Food Chain Economic Analysis project. Traceability of bulk agricultural products meets many of the needs of modern food businesses. Research completed as part of this project added significantly to the body of knowledge in this area.

Future needs identified by those who attended the conference include:

- Alignment of traceability standards with ISO or other global quality management standards
- Increased collaboration with businesses, government agencies, and commodity groups to define the objectives of a traceable program in the United States
- Willingness to pay, cost/benefit, and other economic and physical case studies and simulations to illustrate the business model for specific product cases
- Development of models to estimate risks, and optimize processes and methods
- Software development to facilitate traceability
- Training and education modules to promote quality management systems as a possible solution to traceability needs in the United States.

This conference set the framework on how traceability systems could function with bulk agricultural commodity products. It also illustrated significant knowledge gaps (listed above) needed for successful implementation of a comprehensive traceability system in the United States. Research and training programs in the next few years should be directed at these gaps.



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