

Food safety and technology Part 2 of 4

June 2024

☀️ **Another week, another set of food recalls**

So went the headline of a June 2024 issue of [Food Safety News](#), a weekly US publication, which collects, collates and reports regulator-led food recalls from around the world. The operative word in the headline is “set” due to the plurality of the incidents. Coverage is predominantly USA cases, however, both Canada-wide and province-specific, as well as EU-wide and EU-Member State specific food recalls are covered. There is adequate material to warrant a weekly publication frequency.

☀️ **A race against food hazard outbreaks**

The stated purpose of the FDA’s FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act), signed into law by then US President Barack Obama on January 4, 2011, is “to amend the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act with respect to the safety of the food supply”. It was 2015 before the FDA and regulated parties could visualize any practical requirements and impacts to guide proposed legislation. It is clear that the current volume of food recalls is not, 13 years on, what the FDA had hoped for. The race is on, as the FDA works to harness food hazards and contamination through legislation, while food outbreaks multiply.

☀️ **Whose job is it anyway? [The Story of Everybody, Somebody, Anybody And Nobody](#)**

As recently as the 1990’s and up to the present, some food manufacturers and agricultural producers, worldwide, were and are of an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ mentality wherein concern, responsibility, culpability and control ended when a sales transaction had placed a food out of their possession. Realizing this, and with the aim to enact change for the better, the FDA researched the tracing and tracking capacity of a cross-section of American food producers, manufacturers and retailers. The FDA reported that while some were found to have robust tracing systems “...many other food companies have not adopted traceability systems at all. [...] This means that during an outbreak investigation, our ability to rapidly track and trace specific food products through the supply chain is often impeded by a lack of data.”

☀️ **Mandatory tracing and tracking**

With the aim to protect public health, on January 6, 2025, the FDA’s Traceability Rule 204 - [Enhancing, Tracking and Tracing of Food and Recordkeeping](#) – comes into effect, which authorizes the FDA to require tracing of high-risk foods that have historically been the subject of hazardous outbreaks.

☀️ **The technology of traceability**

On April 24, 2024, the FDA hosted a webinar entitled [Data and Technology in the New Era of Smarter Food Safety](#). The essence of the webinar was a plea by several FDA officials for stakeholders in the food industry – especially those who are regulated only at the state level, and not at the federal level, and thus not accountable to the FDA – to step up to the plate and co-operate with the FDA during a food outbreak. The subtext was a pointed recommendation to adopt traceability technology.

It is necessary to give credit, where credit is due. As the FDA acknowledged, some FBOs (Food Business Operators) implemented tracing and tracking technology decades ago, thanks to a few truly innovative pioneers who transformed their visionary skills into reliable tracing and tracking software. Case in point is Canada’s [Minotaur Software](#) who have been fine-tuning their proprietary tracking and tracing technology since 1985.

☀️ **The FDA: exasperated but not exaggerating**

On June 11, 2024, the FDA issued a public warning letter (all their warning letters are public) to the recalcitrant retailer Dollar Tree, Inc., who, since October 2023, has failed to remove contaminated and hence recalled food from its retail outlets, despite enforcement action taken by the FDA, and by state authorities and local partners in several states. The Constituent Update [FDA Takes Additional Steps Following Investigation of Elevated Lead and Chromium Levels in Apple Cinnamon Puree Products](#) chronologizes the successive enforcement action the FDA has taken to gain Dollar Tree’s co-operation. Clearly, lack of technology is not at the heart of the issue. No technology can replace, circumvent or overcome recalcitrance.